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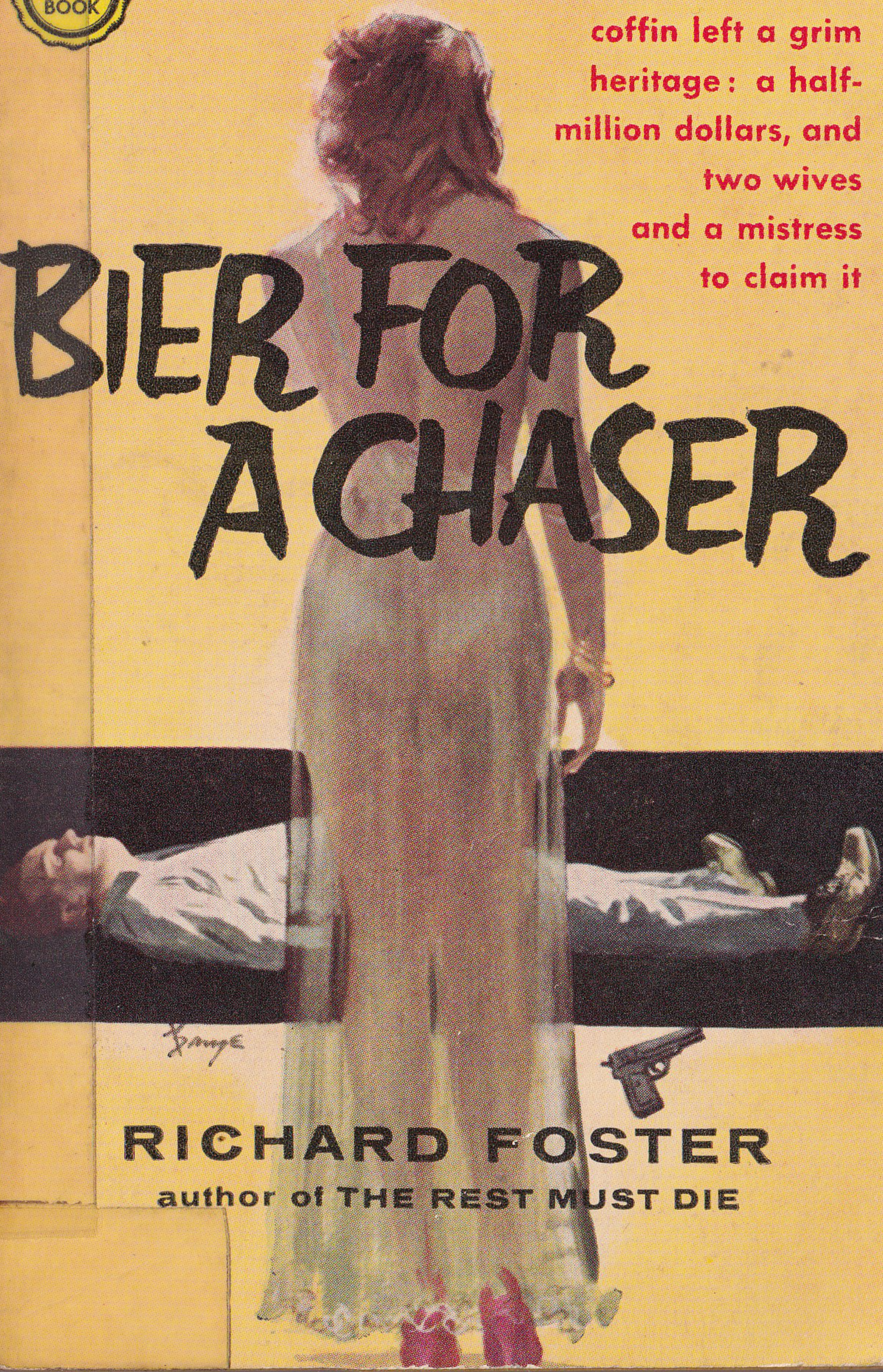
BIER FOR A CHASER



RICHARD FOSTER

author of THE REST MUST DIE

Honey came back into the room and posed beside the nude painting of her. It was hard to tell which was which because she wasn't wearing anything except a pair of gold slippers.

"Don't you think you ought to slip into something?" I said. "You might catch cold."

"It bothers you!" She laughed delightedly. "Guess what happened to me today, Pete?"

"You had a nightmare in which you found yourself out on a busy street with all your clothes on."

She smiled suggestively. "I made all sorts of plans about you and me." She walked toward me, her eyes heavy-lidded. "Honey's sleepy," she said. "So sleepy you'll have to carry her into the bedroom."

Another Original Gold Medal Novel by

Richard Foster:

THE REST MUST DIE

BIER FOR A CHASER

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RICHARD FOSTER

Gold Medal Books

FAWCETT PUBLICATIONS, INC.
FAWCETT BLDG., FAWCETT PLACE, GREENWICH, CONN.

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First Printing, July 1959

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Printed in the United States of America

For

the lady known as Lou

CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS QUITE a procession. In the lead there was a black Cadillac hearse. Then there came five black Cadillacs loaded with flowers. The next car was also a black Cadillac. With one man in it. He wore a black suit, with padded shoulders, and a black tie but he didn't look like a mourner. The eighth and last car was a white Cadillac. I was driving it. Alone. I was wearing cream-colored slacks and a beige sport jacket so I didn't look much like a mourner either.

That was the entire funeral procession. We had left Miami Beach shortly after noon and proceeded north at a sedate pace. We passed through Hollywood and continued on to Rolin City just above it. We got plenty of attention all along the way, but it was mostly because of the flowers. Lots of people die in Florida—they even go there just for that purpose—but they don't usually go out in such a blaze of flowers.

We reached the cemetery in Rolin City and crept in through the gate. That's when we were joined by another car. It was a beat-up old Plymouth and there was just one guy in it, too. If it hadn't been for the flowers people might have thought that the newly departed spirit had been an unpopular citizen while alive.

We all coasted to a stop and the men began unloading the coffin. I got out of my car and walked over to where the fresh grave was dug. The man in the black suit came to stand a few feet from me. The latecomer took up his position behind both of us. He looked even more out of place than I did. He wore blue jeans and a light windbreaker.

The first man I could figure. He had a look you get to recognize after a while. His clothes were too expensive without being quite right. His face was as blank as it could possibly be, his eyes reflecting the light and nothing else. There was a slight bulge in his coat just below the left shoulder. It was the second man who puzzled me. He didn't fit any way I looked at it.

The coffin was carried over and deposited on the ground next to the grave. The mortician finally strolled over to the coffin and stared with disapproval at the three of us. He probably felt artistically slighted at not having a better audience.

"Would anyone," he asked, not really looking at any one of us, "like a last look at the dearly departed before he goes to his last resting place?"

"Yeah," said the man in black before I could say anything.

The undertaker was obviously surprised. "Yes?" he asked as though not sure he could trust his own ears.

"Yes," I said firmly.

A look of resignation came over the undertaker's face and he nodded to his assistant. They unfastened the lid of the casket and lifted it. The man with the black suit and I both stepped forward and looked into the coffin.

The man in the coffin had once been known as Gino Masagna. He'd had more newspaper publicity than a movie star. He'd been on the cover of *Time* and *Life* and *Newsweek,* and his photograph had graced the FBI and most of the police departments in America. There was no question that this was Gino and that he was very dead. As soon as I saw that, I stepped back. The other man stepped away at about the same time.

The third man, the one from the Plymouth, hadn't moved during all of this. It made me wonder about him. He was there, but he wasn't interested in gazing on the features of the dearly departed.

The men put down the coffin lid and then they lowered the coffin into the grave. The clods of dirt began to rain on the box and the undertaker wandered away to nurse his disapproval. I went back to my car and got in. I'd have to wait until the Plymouth left or until the burial was over, but I didn't see any reason to stand around outside like a grieving relative. I hadn't known Gino. I'd never seen him until the men had opened the coffin.

The black suited character got into his Cadillac. Then, finally, the other man turned and sauntered away from the grave. I thought he was going back to the Plymouth. He fooled me. He stopped when he reached my car.

"You got a name?" he asked, bending down to look in the window. His breath smelled like a mixture of whiskey and tobacco—both cheap.

"I have one," I admitted, "but I don't throw it around. What about you?"

"What are you doin' here?" he asked, leaning one elbow on the door.

"I always go to funerals for my kicks," I said gravely. "What's your hobby?"

"Takin' care of smart Yankees," he said with a toothy grin. "You gonna tell me what you're doin' here?"

"I thought it was obvious," I said. "I'm mourning the passing of a dear friend. I thought such things were sacred, even in Florida."

"All right," he said. "I'm gonna back my car out into the street. You follow me, y'hear?" He said car like it was spelled "cyah" and here like it was "heah".

"You have a reason or am I your type?" I asked.

"I got two reasons," he said. He dug into his pocket and came out with a piece of metal. The letters on it spelled out *Rolin City Police*. He let me have a good look at it and then he put it away and dug out his second reason. It was even more convincing. It was a gun. A big one.

"They're good reasons," I admitted. "But I'm not sure they're enough. I haven't lost any cops and I don't want to find any."

"The chief wants to see you," he said. "He told me to invite you nice like and if that wasn't no good I should arrest you."

"On what charge?"

"Disturbing a funeral."

"How?" I asked.

"Driving a white car," he said with a grin.

I knew when I was licked. "Okay. Let's go and see what your chief wants."

He gave me another grin. "Don't forget that I got a gun. So don't try to sneak down no side streets. I shoot right good."

"I'm sure you do," I assured him. "Lead on, Macduff."

I had no idea what this was all about, but I didn't want to get into an argument with the cops, so I watched him in the rearview mirror. He backed out into the street and pulled ahead a few feet. I backed out and straightened out behind him. As soon as I was lined up behind him, he drove off. I followed.

We drove through the small town, twisting and turning, until we finally ended up in front of a pink stucco building that looked more like a house of assignation than a police station. But that was where he stopped and got out of the car, so I did the same. As soon as he saw I was with him, he headed inside and I followed.

Once we were through the door I knew it was a police station. It had the smell. Part sweat, part stale cigar smoke and part stupidity. There's no mistaking the smell. I followed him past the desk, behind which sat a man in rumpled blue pants and shirt, down a long hall and finally into what might have been called an office. At least it had a desk, a chair and a filing cabinet. And a man who sat in the chair—or partly sat on it. He was too big to fit completely on it. When he stood up he was probably six inches over six feet. Sitting or standing, he must have weighed close to three hundred pounds.

"Got him, eh, Fred?" he said with satisfaction as we came in.

"I got him," Fred said.

"No trouble?"

"No trouble. He come like a calf at suckin' time."

"I hate to interrupt such a friendly conversation," I said, "but maybe you'll tell me what's going on?"

The big man looked at me with sleepy eyes. "We ask the questions around here, son," he said. "I'm Lieutenant Hennessey, chief of the Rolin City Police. This is Fred Kane. I guess you might say that he's just an ordinary cop."

"What's this all about?" I demanded.

"Now, just a minute, son," the lieutenant said. He heaved his bulk up out of the chair. "This here is my thinking office. We'd better go to my questioning office."

He led the way out of the office. Fred gestured to me and I followed, with Fred bringing up the rear. We went down the hall for a few feet. The lieutenant opened a door and we entered a room.

I'd seen rooms like this. It was small and the walls were a glaring white. There was one chair in it and that was the only piece of furniture. The one light in the room was fixed so that most of it was shining on the chair. On the floor near the door there were a few of the tools which go with this sort of room. There were a couple of towels, which had once been white but were now almost black, and a police club. Such tools had a long history. When one of the towels was wrapped about the police club it made an efficient questioner and supposedly never left marks.

"Okay," I said. "What's the problem?" The sight of the tools had changed my attitude about the whole thing. I didn't know what it was about, but I knew it was serious.

"Now, you just sit down in that chair, son," the lieutenant said, "and we'll find out." He sounded gentle, but I expected it was only a sound.

There wasn't much choice, so I crossed the room and sat in the chair. The light was blinding, but I tried to pretend that it didn't bother me. I got out a cigarette and lit it.

"I think you've made a mistake," I said, "so let's get it over with."

"We don't make no mistakes, son," the lieutenant said. "Fred, did you search him?"

"No."

The lieutenant made a clucking sound with his tongue. "I keep telling you, Fred, to remember them things. He might have a gun. You never can tell. Them Yankees are tricky. Maybe you'd better look now."

Fred came across to stand behind me. Then he patted me around the chest and felt my pockets. "Clean as a hound's tooth," he reported cheerfully.

"Now, ain't that nice," the lieutenant said. "Maybe we been having the wrong idea about him." He stared at me, rubbing the paunch that hung over his belt. "What's your name, son?"

"Pete Draco," I said.

"That's a good start," he said. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a private detective."

"Now, imagine that," he said, but he didn't sound a bit surprised. "Where do you live?"

"Miami Beach. Collins Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street."

"You mean that's where you stay, don't you, son? You sound to me like you were a Yankee."

"I originally lived up north, if that's what you mean, but I've been living in Miami Beach for several years and that's my home now."

"Sure," he said. "Where you from before you came to Miami Beach?"

"New York City."

"That so?" he said. "New York City to Miami Beach, huh? How come you ain't in the buttonhole-making business?"

He was beginning to burn me up. "You know how it is," I said. "Most Floridians never learn to button up, so there was no future in it."

"You got no call to talk like that, son," he said reprovingly. "What're you doing in Rolin City?"

"I came to a funeral."

"You a kin of the deceased?" he asked.

"No."

"Maybe a friend?"

"Not exactly," I said.

"No? Then why did you go?"

"I was hired," I said. I thought I might as well tell the truth—up to a point.

"Do tell," he said. "You hear that, Fred? Remember how I've been telling you the funny things them Yankees will do?"

"Yeah," Fred said. He was enjoying himself.

"Okay," I said sourly. "This is a very funny act—or it was fifty years ago. But it finally died on the Keith Orpheum circuit, so cut the rustic bit and get down to cases."

"Who was the man who was buried today?" the lieutenant asked.

"Gino Masagna," I said.

"You know who he was?"

"Yes."

"Why were you there?"

"I told you. I was hired to go to the funeral."

"Who hired you?"

"That," I said carefully, "is none of your business. I have a legal right to protect my client."

"Sure you do," he said gently. "Why were you hired to go to the funeral?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "I was paid to go to the funeral and that's all."

"Fred," he said plaintively, "I don't seem to be getting anywhere with our friend. Maybe you'd better talk to him."

Fred shuffled forward, a broad grin on his face. He came across the room into the light, his body rolling as he walked. He stopped in front of me and stood there, his legs spread apart. The grin was fixed on his face. Then suddenly he swung.

I saw it coming and tried to roll with it, but I wasn't quite fast enough. His fist crashed against my jaw and my teeth crashed together as my head snapped back.

"What were you saying, son?" the lieutenant asked calmly.

I told him—not what I'd been saying but what I thought of when Fred hit me—short, Hemingway-type words that fit what I was feeling.

Fred hit me again, this time with a long, looping left that got me in the corner of the eye, ramming my head and producing a rainbow of colors and jarring my eyes until the light flickered. I started to get up. I'd had enough.

I was halfway out of the chair when he swung his foot. The toe of his shoe caught me on the kneecap and I sank back into the chair even though my brain was telling me to do something else. The pain stretched all the way to my groin.

"You shouldn't ought to do that, son," the lieutenant said gently. "Fred takes it amiss when you look like you want to be rough with him."

I made a suggestion about what Fred could do. All it got me was one of Fred's fists in my mouth. My teeth stayed where they were meant to be, but my mouth filled with the salt-taste of blood.

"Now, where were we?" the lieutenant asked. "Seems to me we were talking about how come you drove all the way up here to Rolin City to go to a funeral. What was it you said?"

"That you were a sonuvabitch," I said through my bruised lips.

"You don't want to talk like that, son. Fred has just been warming up. Once he gets started, he can be real mean, Fred can. Maybe you ought to make him stand up, Fred, and show him what you can do then."

"Stand up," Fred said like a well-built robot.

"Make me," I said. The way it looked I had nothing to lose. They were going to have their fun no matter what I did, so I might as well sound like a big man.

Fred's grin got a little broader and a little wetter and he started for me. I braced myself and waited.

Then the door opened and the cop from the front desk stuck his head in. "Marty," he said, "you got a call."

The lieutenant and Fred both stopped and looked around. "Tell them I'm busy," the lieutenant said.

"Not this one, Marty. It's important."

"Oh," the lieutenant said. "I'll take it, Steve. Fred, you hold it and just watch our friend until I get back." He turned and waddled from the room.

Fred looked disappointed, but he drew back and waited. Having lost my first cigarette in the little skirmish with Fred, I took out another one and lit it. It hurt my lips to puff on it, but then my jaw and my kneecap hurt, too, so it wasn't anything special. I smoked and tried to figure out my chances of using the chair to brain both cops and get out of the place.

The lieutenant was gone for five or six minutes while I continued smoking my cigarette and Fred watched me.

Finally he came back, stopping in the doorway, which he filled completely.

"What did you say your name was, son?" he asked me.

"Pete Draco," I said.

"Well, Pete," he went on, "maybe we been pushing you a little too much. Suppose you go on home and think it over, easy-like, and maybe later if you got anything to tell us you can come back up and do it. How's that strike you?"

"You mean I'm free to go?" I asked. From the look on his face, Fred was as surprised as I was.

"Free as the rain, son. This is a law-abiding town and we don't aim to keep anybody unless there's a good reason. Seems to me that you got a few things to explain but there's plenty of time to do that later. Whenever you feel like it."

I didn't understand what could have happened on that phone call to make him change his mind, but I wasn't going to argue with it. I stood up and headed for the door.

I went out and got into my Cadillac. I started the motor and gunned it, more as an expression of my feeling than a need to warm the motor. I pulled away from the police station and kept the accelerator close to the floor board all the way through town. I didn't let up until I hit Hollywood, where I stopped for the two quick drinks I needed very badly. The Martinis burned my lips, but did my stomach a lot of good.

There must have been some blood on my face because the bartender leaned over the bar for a closer look.

"Have an accident?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I cut myself on a sharp cop." I shoved some money across the bar and went out to the Cadillac. I headed it toward Miami Beach and gunned it.

CHAPTER TWO

It had started the night before. Business was slow and I was at loose ends. Business, in my case, was an office on the ground floor of a small building at 27th and Collins in Miami Beach. The sign on the door said *Undercover, Inc.* and my license said I was a private detective. Home was the same address, a four room apartment over the office.

So I was a private eye in Miami Beach, that narrow strip of land bound on one side by the Atlantic Ocean, on the other by Biscayne Bay and filled with money in between. It wasn't quite as glamorous as it sounded at first. Days I helped some tourist try to find his jewelry that had been stolen. Nights I might be following a playful husband or wife. There are always plenty of these. It has been said that an ambitious cop in Miami Beach can make a fortune by just stopping every car with a man and woman in it and suggesting that he's going to take them to the station.

It's a living. When I work my rate is high. When I don't, my spending is about on the same level. Out of it I have a nicely furnished apartment, a well stocked private bar, a closet full of sport clothes and a white Cadillac, all paid for. And a bank account that's always on the edge of disaster.

The bank account was especially low that night, but I was tired of sitting around in the apartment and talking to myself. I had spent so many nights curled up with a good book that I was ready to come out in favor of illiteracy. So I drove up Collins Avenue to the Forties and stopped at the Hapsburg Hotel. It was one of my favorite spots, mostly because I liked the bartenders in the main bar.

I threaded my way through the tourists sitting in the lobby, winked at the bell captain, and entered the bar. It was small and dimly lighted, with a few tables and chairs at one end and a tiny dance floor at the other.

It was early and there were only about a dozen people seated at tables and four more at the bar. I didn't pay any attention to them as I climbed on a stool. My favorite bartender, Buck Farrel, came over and put some Seagram's VO on the rocks in front of me without waiting for an order.

"Did you hear the story," he asked, "about the Martian who landed and went into the bar down on Washington? He looked at the juke box and said, 'Honey, what's a nice girl like you doing in a joint like this?' "

"I heard it," I said gravely. "Last night and the night before and the night before that. Every time from you. Don't you ever hear any new jokes in this place?"

He grinned at me. "It's a tough season. We've got two rooms empty on the second floor."

"Things are tough all over," I said sympathetically. "Where is everybody?"

"It's early. I guess some of them are in the Imperial Room still having dinner. There's a good looking singer who hangs out in there."

It was another one of our standard jokes. "The way she dresses, she'd hang out anywhere," I said solemnly.

He smiled, mopping off the bar with a cloth. His eyes suddenly got shifty, so I knew something was up. Then I caught the scent. It was something out of the Chanel family. I twisted my head to take a look. It was worth it. She was a tall brunette with a figure that would have sent Brigitte Bardot back to the minor leagues.

"Hi, Buck," she said without looking at me.

"Hi," he said. He polished a little harder, then suddenly looked at me as if he hadn't noticed that I'd come in. "Oh. Miss Leonard, this is Mr. Draco." He then saw a customer who had been trying to attract his attention for five minutes and scurried off. I knew then that he was operating, but I didn't know what sort of operation it was.

"Hello, Mr. Draco," she said.

"Hello, Miss Leonard," I returned. I'd play it this way until I found out what was up.

"Buck tells me," she said, looking at my almost empty glass, "that you like VO. There's a double shot of it waiting at my table for you, if you'd like it. On the rocks."

"Buck is a big blabbermouth," I said. "But he has fine taste in whiskey and women. Where is this lucky table?"

She gave me a smile and turned to walk away. I followed her. That was quite an experience in itself. She was wearing a dress from one of those expensive shops where they know how hips should look.

I sat down at the table across from her. Like she'd said, there was a big drink in front of me. A similar glass was in front of her.

"Buck gave a very good description of you," she said. "I think I would have recognized you anywhere."

"It sounds as if you and Buck had been having quite a conversation," I observed. "What else did he say?"

She smiled. "He said that you'd think I was a doll."

"I know Buck better than that. He must have said a living doll. In Buck's world there are dolls and living dolls, but he never gets them confused."

This time she laughed. "He did say that. And I gathered it was quite a compliment."

"The best that Buck has. What else?"

"He also said that you were the best detective that money could hire."

So it was business. Buck often gave me a build-up but he never mentioned what I did unless it had a purpose. "That money can buy is the way it's usually put," I said. "But why does a living doll need a private detective?"

"I want one."

"I come high," I told her. "A hundred dollars a day and expenses. I'm the sole support of a Cadillac and the main support of a number of bartenders, including Buck."

She picked up her purse and opened it. She extracted ten one-hundred-dollar bills and put them on the table between us.

"Will that do for a beginning?" she asked gravely.

"Very nicely," I admitted. I picked up the bills and put them in my pocket before a passing waiter could think it was a tip.

"My name is Joyce Leonard," she said, "but that's my maiden name. My married name is Masagna. Does that mean anything to you?"

"It might," I said carefully.

"My husband's name was Gino Masagna."

I didn't need a scorecard on that. Gino Masagna had been around for twenty years. He'd been mixed up in everything that was illegal—and profitable. It was often rumored, but never proved, that he was high on the list of important men in what the headline writers liked to call the Crime Syndicate. He'd also been somewhere around when quite a number of unsavory citizens had met violent ends. Several Congressional committees had mentioned him every time they talked about the Mafia. From reading the newspapers I knew that Gino had died two days earlier in this hotel. The papers had said it was from a heart attack, but men in Gino's profession get different kinds of heart attacks so I wasn't making any bets on it.

There was one thing I did know. The hundred dollar bills were suddenly getting heavy in my pocket.

"I've heard of him," I said carefully.

"Most people have," she said without humor. "You knew he died here two days ago?"

"Yes."

"It was sudden. I flew down yesterday as soon as I was notified."

"Why do you want a private detective?" I asked bluntly. "Do you think there was something phoney about his heart attack?"

"No," she said. A slight smile was tugging at her lips. "This was one time Gino was on the level. I'm not hiring you to find out if one of his friends killed him. You don't have to worry about that, Mr. Draco."

"Pete," I said automatically. The thousand dollars settled more comfortably into my pocket. "Why are you hiring me?"

"Gino is at the Happy Glade Mortuary here in Miami

Beach. He was taken there before I arrived. He always said that he wanted to be buried in Florida, and a couple of years ago he bought a plot in a cemetery at Rolin City. I telegraphed instructions as soon as I learned that he had died. He will be buried tomorrow. I want you to go to the funeral parlor and then to the cemetery."

I had to say one thing about it. That was the most unusual reason I had ever been given a thousand dollars. "Why?" I asked. "I should think you wouldn't need an escort that badly."

"I have no intention of going. I want you to go in my place."

"Usually the grief-stricken wife wants to be at the funeral," I said drily.

"Who said I was grief-stricken?" she asked. "I hated Gino and I'm glad he's dead."

"It makes a touching picture," I observed.

"Don't be childish," she said sharply. "I was a dancer in a club in Chicago when I met Gino. A stripper. And a damn good one. But I was tired of all the creeps and Gino made a big pitch. I believed that he wasn't the way the papers pictured him. I believed it for maybe forty-eight hours after we were married. Then I learned. He was a son of a bitch all the way through. He married me because that was the only way he could make the grade, but then all I meant was another broad he kept in a house. It didn't stop him from keeping other broads or sleeping with anything that would breathe while it was lying down. Sure, I could spend all the money I wanted to, buy anything, as long as I stayed in that house twenty-four hours a day."

"I see," I said.

"Do you?" she asked bitterly. "How the hell could you know what it's like to be married to a hood like him? To never have any friends or go anywhere or do anything unless the big wheel gives an order. To not even have anybody to talk to and to be on call all the time like any fifty-dollar whore. How could you possibly know?"

"Why didn't you leave?"

"I was going to until he told me what would happen if I tried. He was pretty graphic—as only Gino could be. But how could you know about that? Or what it's like to just sit home and watch television—on any one of ten sets—and read, and to always wear the most expensive and prettiest pants so he could dash in between jobs and rip them off?"

"I can imagine some of it," I said. "Okay, so you hated and feared your husband. I still don't get it. Why do you want me to go to the funeral for you?"

"You didn't know him. He was a tricky sonofabitch. He never told anybody what he was really doing. Maybe he didn't die. Maybe this is a ringer. I want you to go look at him and make sure it's really Gino."

"What about the cops? They should know."

"Maybe. They say it's him. But Gino had been fooling cops all his life. Maybe he did again."

"Okay. Why the funeral parlor and the burial both? Why don't I just go to the funeral parlor, take a look and leave it at that?"

"He was a great little joker," she said. "He used to tell me how I'd have to prove he was dead after he died. So he had a will which he carried around with him. It said that when he died his coffin wasn't to be opened until it reached the cemetery and then only if someone demanded it."

"Cute," I said. "What did he leave you in the will?"

"All that I have and all I can find," she said. "That's the way he put it. Gino called it a sense of humor."

"Okay," I said. I still didn't like it, but I couldn't put my finger on anything definite. "What else do you want?"

"That's all for the moment," she said. "But I've hired you for the next ten days."

"I've noticed," I said.

"Do you know what Gino looked like?" she asked.

"I have a rough idea."

"I'll give you a photograph, so you can be sure. I have one upstairs."

We finished our drinks and went upstairs to get the photograph. We had a little trouble finding it, but some three hours later I left the hotel with the picture. She was the most interesting widow I had ever met.

That was the way it had started, I remembered, as I drove back into Miami Beach the next afternoon. The hours since then had been pretty busy. I had gone to the burial and looked at the corpse and it was Gino Masagna without a question. The only other person there had been the guy who was obviously a hood. That was all right. The gang had probably wanted to be sure that Gino was dead, too. But I hadn't figured on the cops and the beating. I didn't know where that fit. It bothered me.

When I got back to Miami Beach, I realized that Fred had hurt me more than I knew at the time. And I hadn't had much sleep the night before. I stopped off at a liquor store and bought a new jug of VO, then went on to my apartment. I could always call the widow later.

I had a stiff drink, then stripped off and took a hot shower. It took some of the ache from my face. I tumbled into bed and was asleep almost as soon as I hit the sheets.

I don't know what awakened me, but I stirred in my sleep and knew something was different. I forced myself the rest of the way into consciousness and opened my eyes. There was a gorgeous redhead sitting on the edge of the bed and staring at me.

"Hello, darling," she said.

I'd never seen her before in my life.

CHAPTER THREE

She wasn't pointing anything at me except herself, but that was enough to unnerve a man. I reached for a cigarette but she beat me to it. She took one and placed it between my lips. She brought a gold lighter from her purse and snapped on the flame. When she leaned forward to hold it to my cigarette she was even more unnerving than she had been when she was only pointing.

"Now what did you say?" I asked when I had the cigarette going.

"Hello, darling," she repeated.

"That's what I thought you said," I murmured. I looked her over again. Everything about her was expensive, from her shoes to the perfume that kept pushing at me, but in a way it didn't seem to fit. There were a couple of huge diamonds on her fingers but she wore them as if they were rhinestones. "There must be some mistake," I added.

She shook her head and the red hair danced. "You're Pete Draco, aren't you?"

"I think so," I said cautiously.

"Then there's no mistake."

"I don't seem to have a script," I muttered. "Maybe you'd better outline the story to me so I can play along. Am I supposed to have met you in Paris, or something like that?"

"You never met me," she said, "although you may have seen me. Just a minute and I'll tell you why I'm here."

"That might help," I said, but she was already leaving the bedroom. A moment later I could hear her in the kitchen, opening and closing doors. I debated with myself about what to do and decided to stay right where I was. I looked at my watch. I'd been asleep for almost four hours. My bruises still hurt, but the sleep had made me feel quite a bit better. Sure, the redhead was dangerous, but from what I could see it was the kind of danger no man minds.

She came back into the bedroom carrying two glasses. She sat on the edge of the bed and handed one glass to me. I took a sip. It was VO on the rocks.

"I think," I said, pulling myself together, "you'd better do some talking, baby. Start off with who you are, how you got in here and why."

"I'm Honey Parker," she said and waited as though she expected something.

The name was familiar but it didn't ring any special bell. I shook my head.

She pouted. "I'm a stripper," she said. "A good one."

"You ought to be," I admitted. I remembered then that I had seen her name in the columns; that's why it was familiar. "Sorry, baby, but I haven't been around the G-string circuit in years. If I'd ever seen you I'm sure I wouldn't have forgotten you. How did you get in here?"

"I rang your bell but there wasn't any answer. Your car was out front so I thought you'd soon be back. I started asking around and discovered your landlord runs the apartment house next door. So I just told him that you were expecting me and that I didn't want to wait on the street and he let me in."

"Sure," I grunted. "After you had blinked your eyes and pointed your heavy artillery at him."

She giggled. "He did think I was attractive."

"I know just where he was looking, too," I said, tearing my own gaze away from the same spot. "So you got in . . ."

"Then I found you were here and asleep. So I just sat down on the edge of the bed and waited until you woke up. You looked real cute asleep."

"I always look my cutest then."

"Buck was the one who told me about you."

"Buck? You mean at the Hapsburg Hotel?"

She nodded.

"My God, does he know every broad in Miami Beach?"

"I just happened to remember that Buck knows a lot of people here, so I went up and asked him if he knew a good private detective and he said you were the best."

"I'll bet he did," I muttered. "Now for the big question. Why?"

"I wanted to hire you."

"As a private detective?"

"Yes."

"Why?" I asked. "You don't look as if you'd lost anything."

"Well, I haven't exactly, but maybe I have."

"That's clear," I said. "What do you want to hire me for?"

"You know who Gino Masagna was?" she asked.

So that was it. I started to sit up in bed and then realized I wasn't wearing anything. But I was interested. I was beginning to think that everybody was interested in Gino.

"You think he was killed," I asked, "and want me to find out who did it?"

"Oh, nothing like that. The newspapers said he had a heart attack."

"It's too late to ask me to go to the funeral," I said, "so what do you want me to do about him?"

"You talk funny sometimes," she said. "Why should I want you to go to the funeral?"

"Why weren't you there?" I countered.

"I didn't think it would look right. You know . . ."

"I don't know. Why wouldn't it look right?"

"Well—we were very good friends, you might say, but then he had a wife and I have my reputation to think of."

"Uh-huh," I said. "What is it you want me to do?"

"Well—you haven't said whether you'll work for me or not and I don't think I ought to tell you unless you are working for me."

"I can't take the case," I said.

"Please," she said, leaning forward. I could feel my breath starting to come faster. "I'll pay you—and we could be very good friends."

"I still can't," I said. I wasn't surprised that my voice sounded a little hoarse. I'd just discovered that the only thing Honey Parker was wearing beneath her dress was herself. "I have another job that makes it impossible."

She stood up with a flounce. She was a big woman, all of it nice. "All right," she said. She walked across the bedroom floor as though it were a runway. At the door, she looked back. "Think it over, Pete. If you change your mind, look me up. You might find it worth the trouble." She disappeared, leaving me with the feeling that if I applauded she'd come back in with less on. I held my breath and waited until I heard the outer door slam.

When I was sure she was really gone I got out of bed and went into the kitchen. I had another drink, a stiff one. I needed it. I went into the bathroom and had another hot shower. By the time I came out of it my bruises were feeling quite a bit better. I shaved and got dressed. It was almost time for me to pick up Gino Masagna's widow for dinner.

I turned out the lights and went downstairs to my office. I didn't expect to find anything but I looked in the files to see what I had on Gino Masagna, Joyce Leonard Masagna or Honey Parker. I drew a blank. I already knew quite a bit about Gino but nothing that would tell me why both his wife and his girl friend needed a private detective or why they wanted one.

Somebody knocked on the office door. I hadn't bothered to unlock it when I came downstairs. I went over and opened it.

She came into the office, a tall girl with a ridiculous little blue hat perched on her short blonde hair. She wore a blue tailored suit but all the art of the dressmaker couldn't conceal the fact that she was stacked like last year's bills. This was certainly my week for running into beautiful broads; I was beginning to feel like a man who had just hit a jackpot and didn't have any pockets.

While I was examining her, she was looking over the office. Finally she turned to look at me. I think she wanted to smile, but she kept it under wraps.

"Mr. Draco?" she asked. She had a nice voice.

I admitted that's who I was.

"Lieutenant Weston gave me your name. May I see you for a minute?"

I nodded and closed the door. I indicated a chair and went around behind the desk. I knew Lieutenant Weston. He was on the Miami Beach force and was a good cop. We liked each other but he didn't often send me clients.

I took a peek at her left hand. There was a plain ring on the third finger. Maybe that was it.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. —?" I asked.

"My name is Margot Shone Masagna."

My professional smile froze a little at the sound of her last name. "A relative of Gino Masagna?" I asked.

"I was his wife," she said.

That was the one answer I wasn't expecting. I got out a cigarette and lit it just to give myself a little more time.

"That's very interesting," I said finally. "Did you live with him?"

"We had a house in New Jersey," she said. "It's true that Gino wasn't home very often, but you could say that I lived with him. Legally."

"When were you married?"

"Two years ago."

"Why?" I asked bluntly.

"Why?" she repeated uncertainly. "I guess Gino wanted to marry me for one reason only. He'd offered to give me an apartment several times but I refused. I went out with him on dates, but that was all. I suppose that he realized the only way he could have more was to marry me."

"What about you? Were you in love with him?"

She hesitated before answering. "I don't suppose I was. I don't know. I guess I was fascinated by him."

"You knew what you were getting into?"

"Oh, yes. I even knew all about the other women. There were always dozens of them. I suppose that in the beginning I had some idea that he might change after I married him, but it wasn't long before I was glad he did have them."

"Why weren't you at the funeral?"

"I didn't know about it in time. I just arrived in Miami Beach this afternoon. Lieutenant Weston told me that the funeral was over. He said that someone else had arranged for the funeral."

"I see," I said. "Do you know if you inherit anything?"

"I don't know if Gino made a will," she said. "He was always generous with money—as long as I did what he wanted me to—so I have some money in the bank. But even if he didn't make a will, I'll have the rights of a widow."

I wasn't so sure about that, but I didn't say anything. "Why have you come to see me?" I asked.

"I want to hire you. Lieutenant Weston said you were honest."

"You think Gino was killed? Is that why?"

"Oh, no. Lieutenant Weston made it quite clear that Gino died from a heart attack."

"Then what do you expect a private detective to do for you?"

She hesitated, but only for a moment. "Gino arrived in Miami Beach six days ago and he died three days ago. I want you to find out everything that he did during those three days before he died."

"Why?"

"My reasons," she said, "would not be of any assistance to you in doing what I ask. Will you do it for me?"

"No."

"Lieutenant Weston said you were expensive, but I'm sure I can afford it—if it's a question of money."

"It's not," I said. "I can't work for you because of another job. If it should end before you get someone else, then I might reconsider. But at the moment I can't take it."

"Well," she said, "I'm sorry. If you do change your mind, please call me. I'm staying at the Collins Plaza Hotel. Goodbye, Mr. Draco."

She got up and walked to the door. She opened it and went out without looking back. At least, she was different in that she hadn't been even the slightest bit on the make.

I took a deep breath and stared at the closed door. I had now seen three of Gino Masagna's rumored dozens of women. If the rest of them looked anything like the three I'd seen it wasn't surprising that he'd died of a heart attack.

But I was beginning to get curious about why all of his women wanted to hire a private detective. It couldn't be just to find out if Gino had run out on his own funeral. I decided I needed more information. I reached for the phone but it rang before I could reach it. I picked up the receiver and said hello.

"Draco?" a male voice asked.

"Speaking," I said.

"Lay off."

"What?"

"Lay off," he repeated.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Maybe I'm a friend, just giving you a little friendly advice."

"My friends have names," I said, "and when they want to give me advice they tell me what they're talking about."

"Don't try to be too smart, Draco. Just stay away from the broads."

"The broads?"

"Yeah. The two broads who came to see you this afternoon. Be smart and don't take any jobs they ask you to."

"Maybe you'd better tell me who you are," I said. "There aren't very many people I let tell me how to run my business."

"Well, you're being told now," he said. "Them two were Gino's broads. The only reason they'd go to see a private dick would be to hire him."

"Maybe they just find me attractive," I said.

"Don't make me laugh, Draco. But don't take any jobs. Gino is dead and that's all there is to it."

"The king is dead, long live the king," I said.

"Huh?"

"I mean that King Gino is dead and now there's another king and you're talking for him. Does he inherit the broads, too?"

"Just lay off. Broads are always making trouble, so don't try to get into the act. We wouldn't like it."

"It's the first time I ever knew there was a Trendex for private eyes," I said. "Suppose I don't give a damn whether you like it or not?"

"You went to one funeral today," he said flatly. "We can fix up another one for you. Where you'll be the main attraction." There was a click as he hung up without waiting for an answer.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANY WAY YOU LOOKED at the situation it was interesting. Gino Masagna, one of America's leading gangsters, had died of a heart attack. A beautiful brunette had hired me to go to his funeral. A beautiful blonde had wanted to hire me to find out what he did before he died. And a beautiful redhead had just wanted to hire me. Then there had been the very tough police department of Rolin City who had wanted to know why I was at the burial. And now a tough guy who didn't want me to be hired by anyone.

Maybe somebody could tell me why. I picked up the phone and dialed the number of the Miami Beach Police. When they answered I asked for Lieutenant Weston.

"Pete Draco," I said when he came on. "How are you, Dick?"

"Fine," he said. "How are you?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "Did you have anything to do with taking a look at the death of Gino Masagna?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"Was it a real heart attack or did someone help it along?"

"It was real all right, Pete. He'd apparently had a bad heart for years and it finally caught up with him. Why?"

"That's what I'm beginning to wonder," I said. "I was hired by the widow—"

"Which one?"

"The dark-haired one. The other one was here just a few minutes ago. Which one is the real one?"

"How the hell do I know? The police department has enough to do without trying to untangle the love life of every hood. What did you do about the blonde?"

"Turned her down. Also a redheaded stripper named Honey Parker. Know her?"

"Uh-huh. She was Gino's local stop when he was in town."

"Busy, wasn't he?" I said. "What's this all about, Dick?"

"What's what all about?" he countered.

"I was hired last night by the dark-haired woman to go to Gino's funeral today and make sure it was him. That's all. When I went to the cemetery I was picked up by the Rolin City cops and pushed around. This evening both the redhead and the blonde tried to hire me. Then I got a phone call from somebody's tough boy who warned me not to work for anybody. It might make sense if Gino had been knocked off, but not if he died of natural causes. So why the hell is everybody so interested in a dead hood?"

"I can make a guess, Pete," he said, "but if I'm right, you're lucky you haven't been visited by more people."

"All right, make a guess."

"Gino's been coming through Miami Beach pretty regularly the last few months. On his way to and from Cuba. Does that spell anything to you?"

"The gambling in Havana?"

"No," the lieutenant said. "We're pretty certain that Gino and his pals were selling guns to Castro in Cuba. The Federal men have been on it for some time and we're interested because in some way it works through Miami Beach. But we've never been able to pin anything down."

"What does gunrunning have to do with me?"

"We're pretty sure that Gino's group always had to be paid in advance and that Gino collected the payments himself. He either collected the money from Castro in Cuba or made the deal there and then came back and collected the money here in Miami Beach. Nobody's been able to prove it, but we know that a lot of Castro's support comes from here. When Gino died he had a reservation on the New York plane for the next day, so it's a pretty good bet he had already made his collection of the advance payment. Which means that he probably had several hundred thousand dollars. In cash."

"Which you didn't find among his things?"

"Right," he said. "Somewhere around town there's quite a bundle of cash waiting to be picked up."

I whistled softly. "So that's why the three women are so interested in hiring a private detective."

"I'd guess so," he said drily. "And if you're trying to find it you'll find more and more people interested in what you do. As a matter of fact, we'd like to find the money. So would the Federal men. Not to mention the local agents of Castro, who hasn't received his guns yet, and Gino's friends who won't send any guns until they get the money. And, as you say, Gino's three women, who must know about it."

"Quite a little army," I said. "Who does the money belong to?"

"Who the hell knows? I'd say that the courts will have to untangle it, if the money is found. If it can be proved that the money was paid for an illegal purpose then the government might confiscate it. If not, but if it can be proved it was in Gino's possession, the court might award it to Gino's estate, or the widow. Or if the person who gave it to Gino can prove he did so and did it for a legitimate reason he might possibly get it back. I doubt if Gino's friends could possibly get it through a court. Neither could the redheaded stripper nor the wife who is illegally married. You pays your money and you takes your choice."

"How do the Rolin City cops figure in this?" I asked.

"Rolin City is where Big Jim Anderson lives. Know him?"

"Not intimately. All I know is what I read in the papers. Along with Gino, he's supposed to be one of the men who rule whatever organized crime there is in this country."

"That's close enough. He's been living up in Rolin City for several years."

"And he's got the Rolin City cops in his back pocket?"

The lieutenant sighed. "I don't like to say it about any cop, but that is the general idea."

"Well," I said, "it makes me feel a little better. At least, I know what it's all about so that I don't feel quite so much like a bird that accidentally flew into the middle of a badminton game."

"Pete," he said, "are you going to look for the money for your client?"

"She hasn't asked me to."

"If she does?"

"I don't know, Dick," I said honestly. "It sounds like it's going to be a rough game, but I suppose I'll play if she asks me to. I've got a bad habit; I like money."

"Can we expect you to cooperate?"

"I always have, haven't I?"

"Yes, but I'm asking about this case."

"I'll cooperate as much as I can," I said, "and still protect my client."

"Okay," he said gruffly. "I guess that's all I can ask for. But Pete . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Watch yourself. This isn't a divorce case."

I made a rude suggestion and hung up. I sat at the desk for a minute thinking about what Lieutenant Weston had told me. Maybe Joyce Leonard Masagna had wanted me to go to the burial, but it was a cinch that she wanted more than that for the money she'd given me. She'd want the money Gino had been carrying. And according to the lieutenant so did a lot of other people. Which meant that once again Pete Draco was going to be right in the middle.

I went out to the white Cadillac and drove to the Hapsburg Hotel. I turned it over to one of the boys in front of the hotel and went in. I was a little early for the date with Joyce, but I was supposed to meet her in the bar so I went on in. I climbed on a stool and waited.

Buck came over and poured a shot of VO on the rocks. He took a look at my face and poured a second shot in the glass. He leaned on the bar. "Did you hear the story about the Martian who wanted to meet Brigitte Bardot?" he asked.

"I hear it," I said. "Buck, do me a favor."

"Anything, Mr. Draco."

"Don't send me any more broads, no matter how beautiful they are."

"The redhead?" he asked. "She's something, huh? All right, though, no more broads," he said solemnly. Then he grinned. "Not even this one?"

I caught the scent of her perfume even before I saw her. It was Joyce. She slipped into the seat next to me.

"Sorry I'm late," she said.

"Don't worry, Buck was keeping me entertained," I said. I picked up my drink. "Let's move to a table. Talking in front of Buck is just like being on a national network."

Buck gave me a dirty look but kept on polishing the bar as we moved over to a table. I hailed a passing waiter and ordered her a drink. We both waited there until it came.

"Did you go to the cemetery?" she asked when the waiter was gone.

"Yes," I said. "It was Gino, all right."

"I was sure it was," she said. "The police wouldn't make a mistake about his identity, but I thought it best to doublecheck it. Was there anyone else there?"

"The undertaker and his assistants. Then there was a guy whose coat fit him a little tightly under the left arm. And a cop from Rolin City. That was all."

"A cop from Rolin City?"

"Yeah. He seemed upset because I came in a white Cadillac instead of a black one."

She wasn't sure whether I was kidding her or not. "Did they do anything to you?"

"No," I said gravely. "I explained that I was color-blind and hadn't realized which one of my Cadillacs I was taking. Well, now that I've found it really was Gino they were sticking in the ground I guess the job is over, and I should give you back about nine hundred dollars of the money you gave me last night."

She put one hand on my arm. "No, Pete. I want you to keep working for me. I gave you a thousand dollars so you still owe me nine days."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Well, you can start by taking me to dinner every night. . . ."

"That's all?"

"I may think of something else," she said lightly.

"Such as," I asked, "finding a few hundred thousand dollars in cash that Gino had?"

The smile disappeared from her face. "Do you know about that?"

"Doesn't everybody?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"There seem to be quite a few people who want the money Gino was supposed to have. My guess is that is the real reason you want a private detective. Only I seem to be the last person to find out about it."

"How did you find out?" she asked.

"The police."

"Do they know how much he had?"

"Not exactly. They guessed a few hundred thousand. How much was it?"

"Five hundred thousand."

"In cash?"

She nodded.

"Money for guns to Cuba?"

"I think so," she said. "Gino never gave any details, but I know that he'd been going to Cuba often and that he always brought back a lot of money. I never knew how much, but this time he'd said something about carrying a half million dollars in cash."

"And that is what you want me to do, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "It wasn't among his things and he didn't put anything in the hotel safe. You'll do it, won't you, Pete?"

"Maybe he put it into a bank here."

"He'd never do that. Most of Gino's business was always done in cash and he'd never have anything to do with banks or checks. That would leave records."

"Then maybe somebody took the money after he died."

"I suppose that's possible," she said, "but I doubt it. I think Gino was too clever to just carry it in his pocket."

"Why do you want me to find it?"

"Gino left me all that I have and all I can find. I want that money. I have a right to it. I earned it, over and over, by being his wife."

"Which brings up an interesting point," I said. "When did you marry Gino?"

"Four years ago."

"Then I guess you are the legal widow—unless he also married somebody else before he did you."

"He was married, but his wife died about six months before I married him. Is that why you wanted to know when I married him?"

"No," I said. "There's another Mrs. Masagna in Miami Beach. Gino married her two years ago in New York."

She laughed harshly. "So he ran into another girl he couldn't buy and he committed bigamy to get her. That sounds like Gino. How did you find out about her?"

"She came to see me this evening," I said. "She wanted to hire a private detective. I told her I already had a job and couldn't work for her."

"Did you tell her about me?"

"No. Earlier I was also visited by a local girl friend of Gino's. She also wanted to hire a private detective. Neither one of the girls mentioned money, but I expect they're both looking for the same thing you are."

She laughed again but there was no humor in it.

"That's only the beginning," I said. "Gino's friends are also after the money, believing that it rightfully belongs to them. And I am told that the Federal men as well as the local police are looking for it and that there's a pretty good chance that someone representing the Cuban rebels will be after it since it was meant as payment for goods not yet delivered. Wherever the money is it's going to be a little crowded there when it's found."

"But you'll find it for me, won't you, Pete?" she asked.

"Maybe," I said. "It's a little complicated, honey. If Gino's friends or the Cuban people get it I think you can just kiss it goodbye. If the cops or either one of the girls get it, you might have a chance in court. In fact, even if you get it yourself it might have to be settled in court."

"That doesn't worry me," she said. "I talked to a lawyer before I left Chicago. As long as I can prove that Gino had the money, I'll be all right. Nobody will dare state what the money was for so that will cripple the ones who gave the money to Gino and those who expect to collect it."

"It will in court," I admitted, "but they won't be so crippled from behind a gun."

"That's why I need you to help me," she said. "But you still haven't said you will."

"I'll try to find it, as long as you understand one thing," I said. "I'm not going to put myself in bad with the cops. The way it looks to me now, the money will have to be turned over to them for the courts to decide the ownership—even if you find the money. If I do locate it, and if I change my mind, I'll hand it over to you. If I don't change my mind I'll give it to the cops."

She was silent for a minute. "All right, Pete," she said finally. "I want you to work on it and I guess that's fair enough. I'm not afraid to try to prove it's mine in court. And if you get it for me I'll give you ten per cent."

"I'll work for the hundred a day; it keeps me more honest," I said. "Let's go have some dinner."

We went into the hotel dining room. We ordered, having a couple more drinks while we waited for the food, and talked about other things.

Joyce was not only a beautiful woman, she was an interesting one. I enjoyed being with her and even found it exciting, but I didn't fool myself. There was something twisted in her or she would never have married Gino Masagna. Living with him had probably made it worse. Every once in a while I could glimpse the twisted part of her. From now on any man who tried to live with her would always be reaching for something that wasn't there.

Still I enjoyed having dinner with her and later when she wanted me go upstairs with her it was quite a struggle to say no. But I managed it.

"Was I too easy a conquest last night?" she asked with a crooked smile.

"No," I said truthfully. "You want me to find the money for you?"

"Yes, but—"

"It's going to be a race," I interrupted, "and it's not going to be won up in your room. It's simple, honey. Which do you want the most—me or the half million dollars?"

"The money," she said promptly.

"You see how you flatter me?" I said with a smile.

"And then you," she added.

"Sure," I said. "So?"

"You're right, Pete," she said. "It's just that I get so lonely sitting around this hotel. That's all I've been doing for four years—just sitting around. Will you at least have dinner with me tomorrow night?"

"We'll see, honey," I said. "Good night."

I went out through the lobby and one of the boys brought my car up in front of the door. I gave him a dollar and got in. I shifted to "drive" but, before I could step on the accelerator, the door opened and a man slipped in beside me. There was a gun in his hand, concealed from anyone on the outside.

"Take it nice and easy, Draco," he said. It was the same voice I'd heard on the telephone earlier. "Just drive off like we were good friends and don't try anything."

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE ARE SOME things you can't fight. A gun in your ribs when you're sitting in a car is one of them. Unless you're tired of living you do what the guy holding the gun tells you to do. At least I did. I drove carefully away from the hotel and started up Collins Avenue.

"What's the game?" I asked once we were away from the hotel.

"You've been picked to be the star of a big quiz show," the gunman said. He laughed with enjoyment at his own sense of humor. "Too bad it ain't going to be on TV."

"If you were going to be on it, too," I said, "it would have to be a monster rally."

"Don't be a comedian," he said harshly. He shifted the gun to his left hand and pressed it against me. With his right hand, he checked to see if I had a gun.

"No gun and I thought you were supposed to be a tough boy," he sneered when he'd finished.

"I only carry a gun when I have to deal with dangerous characters."

"Yeah?" He jabbed me with the gun. It was hard enough to hurt. "Maybe you'll sing a different tune later."

"Are we going some place in particular?" I asked. "Or are you and I just going to ride around in the moonlight because it's romantic?"

"Keep going straight north," he said, "until we hit Rolin City. Then I'll tell you which way to go."

I noticed there was a car sticking pretty close behind me. For a minute I had a wild hope that maybe it was a tail that the Miami Beach Police had put on me, but more serious thought made me realize it was a foolish hope.

"Where's your partner?" I asked casually.

"Right behind us."

I glanced at him. "Rolin City, huh? I ought to be able to figure that out. Even you don't look stupid enough to be on the Rolin City cops, so that must mean that you work for Big Jim Anderson."

"Wise guy, huh?" he grunted.

"I try to be modest about it," I said. "Do you have a name or should I just call you Shirley?"

"Cut it," he said, jabbing me with the gun again. "I'm Eddie Hanshew."

He'd given his name with pride and I thought it sounded familiar so I gave it some thought. Then I remembered where I knew it from. There had been a piece in one of the weekly magazines a few months earlier. Gino Masagna and Big Jim Anderson had been mentioned in the story, but it had been mostly about Eddie Hanshew and another gunman. The magazine had said that they were two of the chief executioners for organized crime. I remembered that it had said that between them the two men had been arrested well over a hundred times but neither of them had ever been convicted of anything, not even overtime parking.

I searched my memory some more and finally came up with the other name that had been in the article.

"Is that Johnny Lane back there?" I asked.

"That's Johnny."

We soon swept through Hollywood and within another five minutes reached Rolin City. As soon as we entered the city Eddie started giving me directions. I realized that we were heading toward the wealthy section of Rolin City which probably meant that they were taking me directly to Big Jim Anderson's house.

We finally turned in a private driveway. Ahead was a huge, luxurious, typical Florida mansion. Eddie had me follow the driveway around back of the house and park. The car that had been following came up and parked beside us. Eddie climbed out and motioned with the gun for me to follow.

We were standing not far from a big swimming pool.

There were no lights in the rear of the house, but the moonlight was bright enough to show everything clearly. Beyond the swimming pool I could make out another building of some sort.

We skirted the pool and soon reached the building. Eddie reached around me and unlocked the door with a key. He nudged me again and I opened the door and stepped inside. Eddie flicked on a light and closed the door behind us.

The building was just one big room, but that one room was as large as two or three normally big rooms. There were two large leather couches and several huge leather chairs. There was a television set and an elaborate hi-fi layout. Against one wall there were several slot machines. At one end there was a pool table and a bar. Nearer to the door there was a desk and chair with several filing cabinets next to them. It looked like the sort of hideout any man might have if he could afford it.

Eddie waved the gun. "Sit down. The boss will be here in a minute."

I sat down in one of the leather chairs and got out a cigarette. I lighted it and waited. But it wasn't long before the door opened and the two men came in. The first one was small and lean, with a sharp, dark face. I knew he must be Johnny Lane.

The second man was big. He must have been about six feet three and weighed at least two hundred and fifty. His darkly tanned face was fleshy with heavy jowls. There was a scar across one jaw. His short hair was iron gray. I had never seen him before but I recognized him from his pictures. This was Big Jim Anderson.

Unlike a lot of his companions in crime, Big Jim was strictly a native product. If the Federal Government ever did get anything on him it wouldn't be able to deport him. He'd been around a long time, since the days of Prohibition, and was now in his sixties. He had been one of the few men who met together not long after the Valentine Day massacre and decided that the big gangs should work together instead of fighting each other. He'd been an important part of that setup ever since.

"Hello, boss," Eddie said as he came in. "This is the guy."

Big Jim Anderson looked at me and I could see something of his power and ruthlessness in the expression of his blue eyes. He stared at me for a full minute without saying anything. Then he walked over and sat on one of the couches. He took out a cigar and flicked on a gold lighter.

"You are Peter Draco?" he was staring at me again. His voice was heavy and had long ago lost any trace of expression.

"I am," I said. "And you're Big Jim Anderson.

He nodded. "You're a private detective?"

"Yes."

"Who are you working for?"

"Sorry," I said. "I don't give out information like that."

"He's working for the broad from Chicago," Eddie said. "I'll bet on it. Like I told you, boss, the redheaded broad went to see him today and so did the broad from New York. They didn't stay around long. But tonight he went to see the other broad and was with her until just a while ago. We picked him up on the way out."

Big Jim nodded, still looking at me. "That was the only trouble with Gino. He always had to keep chasing women. I used to tell him it would make trouble for us some day. Now maybe it has. So you're working for Gino's widow?"

I didn't say anything.

"Why did you go out to Gino's funeral today?" he asked.

"To see if it was Gino in the casket," I said. I knew I couldn't refuse to talk completely. "You were Gino's friend. Why weren't you there?"

"I never go to funerals," he said. "I sent flowers. Did you see them?"

"I saw what looked like several tons of flowers. Very pretty. So you knew that it was Gino in the casket and that's why you didn't go?"

"We were pretty sure it was Gino, but we did send a man to take a look. He reported back that it was Gino, all right."

That was the guy in the black suit who had been in the cemetery with me. "You mean you sent two men," I said.

"Two?" he asked.

"Yeah. That cracker cop who took me to the station house afterward and started to work on me."

"Oh, him," Big Jim said in a tone of dismissal. "We told him to keep a watch on the cemetery. That was all. He was doing the rest of it on his own."

"Was it you who called and stopped them?" I asked.

He nodded. "I don't like people to do things on their own."

"How did you know what was happening?" I asked.

"My man who was there told me about you and that the police had taken you away. I could guess the rest."

"Well, I guess I owe you some thanks for stopping them."

He waved one hand to indicate it was nothing. "How much is Mrs. Masagna paying you, Mr. Draco?" He was so damn polite I would have thought he was a paternal business man if it weren't for those eyes.

"My regular fees are a hundred dollars a day and expenses," I said.

"I like to go straight to the point, Mr. Draco. I'll give you five thousand dollars."

"For what?"

"To not do what Mrs. Masagna wants you to do."

"Sorry," I said. "I already have a job and I'm afraid that I can't take another one—even one that seems to demand so little time."

"Ten thousand," he said flatly.

"I'm afraid you don't understand. I have a client. I can't and won't leave one client for another."

"Everybody can be bought," he said.

"You're probably right," I said, "but everybody's price isn't money. Mine isn't.'"

"It's the broad, boss," Eddie said. "She's a hot-looking piece."

"Is that it?" Big Jim asked me.

"No," I said.

"Shut up, Eddie," he said flatly. He stared off at the ceiling for a minute, puffing on his cigar. Then his gaze came back to me. "Mr. Draco, Gino and I had certain business interests together. He was down here on business and had collected a considerable amount of money which belonged to the business. In cash. He was to take the money back to New York, so although I spoke to him on the phone a couple of times while he was here I do not know where he was keeping the money. But the money was ours. I am not interested in anything except protecting those business interests by recovering the money. You should understand that."

"I understand it," I said.

"Good. Then you should also understand that no one else has a right to that money. So, regardless of the fee, you should be willing to work for the rightful owners of the money rather than to try to find it for someone who has no right to it."

"I haven't said that I was helping anyone to look for it," I said.

He sighed heavily. "I was hoping that you would not be difficult, Mr. Draco. I'll go to fifteen thousand."

"No."

He made a gesture of futility with one hand. "Eddie . . ."

"Sure, boss," Eddie said. With that, he swung the gun in his hand.

I'd been watching Big Jim, which was the wrong place to look. I saw Eddie's movement out of the corner of my eye and tried to duck, but I was too late. The barrel of the gun caught me on the side of the head just above the ear and knocked me out of the chair. My head was ringing and for a minute my eyes wouldn't focus. When everything in the room finally swam back into place, the first thing I saw was Eddie standing over me, the gun swinging loosely in his hand.

I was still staring at Eddie when something exploded against my cheek. My head snapped over and I tried to shake the buzzing out of my ears. I looked up and saw that it was the other gunman who had hit me.

By the time I got to my feet, Eddie was moving toward me, his face tight with anger.

"Stay back, Johnny," he said thickly. "He's all mine."

"Mr. Draco," Big Jim said, "my offer is still fifteen thousand."

I told him what he could do, too, without taking my gaze off of Eddie. He came in carefully. He swung and I ducked, realizing as I did that he had feinted me out of position. A moment later the barrel of the gun raked down across my cheek, leaving a burning trail. Something warm trickled down my cheek. I reached up to touch it and my hand came away red with blood.

This time the gun caught me along the jaw and I went down again. I struggled to my feet, swinging. But Eddie wasn't there. He'd shifted to one side and hit me again. Everything in the room was swimming around. I threw my arms up to try to protect my head, but the gun beat its way through the hammer against my head. Again and again.

"Eddie," I heard a voice say as though from a great distance. "Eddie, that's enough."

I don't know how long I stood there before I realized that the blows had actually stopped.

"There's a bathroom back there," Big Jim said, waving toward the back of the room. "Go in and wash your face. Then come back."

I turned and weaved toward the back. My legs felt as if I were just getting over a bad drunk. I finally found the bathroom door and went in. I took one look in the mirror and then decided not to look again. Finally I went over and turned on the shower and stuck my head under the spray. The cold water stung as it hit my face, but it felt good, and slowly my senses began to return. Finally I backed off and fumbled until I found a towel. I used it gingerly on my face until it was dry.

I didn't know what the next chapter was going to be but I knew that I couldn't stay there in the bathroom forever. And there wasn't even a window through which I could make a getaway. But I did feel better and maybe I could handle myself better this time. I opened the door and went back into the other room.

The three of them were still exactly where I'd left them. Eddie was breathing a little easier, but there was a glazed look in his eyes as though he'd just come from being with a woman.

"Mr. Draco," Big Jim said, "I'm withdrawing my offer of fifteen thousand dollars. But you would do well to remember that I don't intend to have any interference. This time I stopped Eddie before he really got started. The next time I may not stop him."

"The next time," I said evenly, "there may not be anyone to stop me."

"Perhaps," he said, but I could see he didn't believe it. "That's the risk Eddie has been taking for a long time. But if I were you, Mr. Draco, I would keep in mind the small lesson Eddie has given you tonight. It might save you considerable trouble."

"Are you telling me that I can go now?" I asked.

"Certainly."

"Good." I walked to the door, Johnny and Eddie getting out of the way. I opened the door and then looked back at Big Jim. "I get the idea that Eddie and Johnny are important employees of yours. If that's true, I suggest that you put them in cold storage for a while. I'm not sure that I'll be satisfied with just beating them up." I didn't wait for an answer. I went out and slammed the door. I went over to my car and got in. I quickly backed it out and headed for the main part of the city.

This was the second time I'd been beaten in one day and I was beginning to get a healthy prejudice about Rolin City. Even so I decided to stop and get a drink. The way I was feeling I needed it badly. When I reached the main part of the city I stopped at the first bar I came to. I parked and went in.

I ordered a triple drink of Seagram's VO. With ice. I worked away at the drink and began to feel a little better as the fire built up in my stomach. By the time I'd finished it, the ache in my face was a little fuzzy around the edges. I was debating whether to have another one or wait until I got home when I became aware suddenly that someone was speaking to me over my shoulder.

"Well, if it ain't the Yankee," the voice was saying. "What are you doin' back here, Yankee?"

I turned and looked. It was Fred Kane, the Rolin City cop who had picked me up at the cemetery and then worked me over at the station. The way I was feeling I think I was almost glad to see him. I needed something to aim my anger at.

"What are you doing here, Yankee?" he repeated in a loud voice. He'd been drinking and from the smell of his breath it had been pretty cheap whiskey.

"Having a drink," I said.

"I ain't so sure you're welcome here," he said. "Any Yankee who goes to a funeral just for laughs ain't the kind of man we like."

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. "I'm not sure I could survive having you like me. Why don't you run along and find somebody to beat up."

"Maybe I don't have to go far," he drawled. He reached out and grabbed me by the coat.

'Take your hand off me," I said.

"This time," he said, tightening his grip, "maybe there won't be anybody to stop me questionin' you."

I kneed him as hard as I could. He gasped and let go of my coat. I pushed him away from the bar and stepped out where I'd have room to move. I could feel a kind of happiness building up inside of me. I'd been pushed around twice that day and just to push back a little was the best medicine I could get.

He straightened up slowly, his face tight with pain and anger. "I'll get you for that, Yankee," he said. He started to reach for his pocket.

I stepped in fast and hit him in the belly as hard as I could. He gasped again and bent forward. I reached up and grabbed his hair with both hands, jerking down on it. At the same time I brought my right knee up. There was a crunch as the cartilage in his nose gave way and he made a hoarse rattling sound in his throat. I threw his head back up and let go. He stared wildly at me, the blood already beginning to spray from his nose.

I stepped in again and hit him as hard as I could on the point of the chin. The anger and pain faded from his eyes. He swayed a minute, then dropped to the floor. He was unconscious before he hit.

The bartender was hurrying around the end of the bar. "Here," he yelled, "I won't have none of that in here." He glared at me. "Do you know that was a police officer you hit?"

"I know what the sonuvabitch was," I said. My arm still tingled from that last blow but it was a real good feeling.

"You'll pay for that, mister," the bartender said. "I guess I ought to hold you here while somebody calls the station."

"You want to try?" I asked him gently. I started to walk toward him, which was also in the direction of the door.

He stood his ground for a second, then moved to one side. I walked past him and on to the door. I could feel an itching between my shoulder blades, but I didn't look back until I reached the door. Then I stopped and looked. Everyone was in the same position they'd been in the last time I'd noticed.

"The name is Draco," I said. "Pete Draco. Tell that crumb on the floor that the next time he meets me he'd better get off the sidewalk and hold his hat in his hand. Or I might really hurt him."

With that I went out and climbed in my car and drove out of town. As soon as I passed the city limits I gunned it.

It was fairly late by the time I got back into Miami Beach. I went straight down Collins Avenue until I came to my place. There was another car parked almost in front of my office, but that wasn't unusual and I didn't pay any attention to it. I parked behind it and got out. I locked my car and headed for the office door.

"Pete," a voice called. There was something familiar about it.

"Yeah?" I said, turning.

Two men were getting out of the other car. They straightened and turned and I saw that one of them was Lieutenant Weston. I didn't know the other man with him.

"Can we see you for a minute, Pete?" the lieutenant asked.

"Sure," I said. "What are you doing out at such a late hour?"

"Just waiting around," he said. "Where've you been, Pete?"

"Rolin City," I said. "Wait a minute. What's this all about?"

"You had a fight up there tonight with a cop named Fred Kane?"

"Yeah. That's the one I told you about. Is he making a complaint?"

"No," Lieutenant Weston said gently. "He's been murdered and they seem to think you did it."

CHAPTER SIX

For a minute I just stared at him, not being sure that I'd heard right. But then I knew I had and I turned and led the way into my office. I snapped on the lights and went around to sit behind the desk.

"Who's that with you?" I asked the lieutenant.

"Oh, I forgot you hadn't met him," Weston said. "Sergeant Carr. Pete Draco, one of the few honest private detectives around—when he isn't being accused of murder."

The sergeant gave me a grin and a nod of his head.

"Now, what's this about the cop in Rolin City?" I asked.

"The way we get the story," the lieutenant said, "you were in a bar called The Bayou in Rolin City and got in an argument and then a fight with a policeman named Fred Kane. They claim the fight started when he tried to arrest you. They say you used pretty rough tactics and knocked him out. You threatened the others when they tried to stop you from leaving. There seem to be several witnesses who state that just before you left you threatened to kill Kane if you ever saw him again. After you were gone, Kane came around and almost immediately left the bar. He was gone a couple of minutes when several of the men heard a distant shot. Somebody went to investigate and they found Kane a block away, dead. He'd been shot through the head. They think the gun was a thirty-eight. That's about it except for the fact that they're sure you did it."

"What do you think, Dick?" I asked.

"I've already told you what I think about the Rolin

City police," he said. "I don't think you'd be stupid enough to kill a cop over a fight, but I've got to ask you the usual questions anyway."

"Okay," I said. "Kane is the guy who earlier today took me into the station up there and started to beat me up. Tonight I was in the bar having a drink when he came over and started getting tough. He had some idea of taking me in and working on me again. He even grabbed me by the coat. I told him to let go and when he didn't we tangled. I'll admit I was a little rough on him but no rougher than he was earlier. And when I left I told the bartender to tell him to stay out of my way in the future. Then I got into my car and drove home. That's all there is to it."

"Kane mark your face up?" Weston asked.

"No. Somebody else did that before I went into the bar."

"Who?"

"It had nothing to do with Kane and let's say at the moment it was a private fight. In Rolin City, not Miami Beach."

"Big Jim's boys, huh?" he guessed with a grin. "Which one was it, Eddie or Johnny?"

"Eddie. And it's still a private fight."

"Okay, Pete, but watch yourself. He's a mean one. I guess I'd better take a look at your gun, Pete."

"Sure," I said. "I haven't even had it out of the drawer for months." I unlocked one of the drawers of the desk and pulled out my gun and the shoulder holster. The gun was a short-barreled .38. I handed it over to Lieutenant Weston. He gave it to the sergeant without looking at it.

"I'm keeping it out of cold storage now," I said. "I've been pushed around enough today to last me the rest of my life."

Weston smiled and glanced at the sergeant who had been examining my gun.

"This one wasn't used," the sergeant said. "The inside of the barrel even has dust in it. I'd say it hasn't been fired in two months or more."

"Okay," Weston said. He took the gun and handed it back to me. "If you think anyone else is going to be knocked off when you're around maybe you'd better leave it the way it is."

"I'll take my chances on that," I said. "From now on I'm taking it with me. I feel too lonely without it. Anything else, Dick?"

"I guess not," he said. "I didn't think you'd do it but we had a call from the Rolin City cops and I wanted to check it out so they can't complain. I'll report back that we think you're in the clear and that'll probably be the end of it. But I'd stay out of Rolin City, if I were you."

"Maybe," I said.

He got up and motioned to the sergeant and they both went out. I walked over and locked the door behind them. I went back to the desk and rummaged around in the drawer. I found an old rag and a can of gun oil and went to work on the gun. In a few minutes I had it all shined up, inside and out. I put the oil and rag back and dug out a box of shells. I closed and locked the drawer. Carrying the gun, holster and shells I went upstairs to my apartment, flicking the office light off from the top of the stairs.

I hung up my coat and the gun and holster in the closet and went into the kitchen. I mixed myself a good stiff drink and perched on the edge of the table while I drank it. I had to figure out some place to start in looking for the money and I didn't have the slightest idea where. Even in large bills, a half million dollars in cash would take up a little space.

The murder of Fred Kane was also interesting but I didn't think it was too important. The way he acted there could easily be several hundred people who had wanted him dead. Or maybe Big Jim had been displeased with him. It also occurred to me that someone might have witnessed my fight with him and had the idea that I would make a good fall guy. But it certainly couldn't have anything to do with the money and that was my chief problem.

I finished the drink, rinsed out the glass and put it away. I headed for the bedroom, turned on the bedroom light and walked over to the night table. I reached to throw back the bed covers—and then I saw her.

It was the blonde. The second and illegal Mrs.

Masagna. The one who had been so formal and not the least on the make. Refreshing, I had thought. Now she was lying on top of my bed without a stitch of clothes on her. She was watching me, a little smile on her face.

"Hello," she said.

"I was wondering what was the proper thing to say in this situation," I said. "I guess I overlooked the simple approach. It must be because I'm accustomed to a more formal meeting with people who want to hire me. Maybe I've been overlooking something."

She laughed and stretched her body. "Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked.

"What I can see of you is," I said, "and I guess that doesn't leave much in doubt."

I sat gingerly on the edge of the bed.

"How did you get in here?" I asked. Then I remembered something. "Don't tell me. Let me guess. You hunted around and found out that my landlord runs the place next door. So you gave him your prettiest smile and said you were supposed to meet me here and he let you in, leering all the time."

"That's right," she said. "How did you guess?"

"I'm talented. I think I will have to have a talk with the man and tell him I'm not quite what he thinks."

"Aren't you?" she asked. She was amused by the whole thing.

"Second question," I said, trying not to look at her so that I could keep my mind on what I was saying. "Why are you here—or shouldn't I ask that question?"

"I came for two reasons," she said. "I was hoping that I could still get you to work for me, but the main reason was that I was frightened."

"Of what?"

"When I left you," she said, "I went straight back to my hotel. I hadn't been there long when I got a phone call. Do you know Eddie Hanshew?"

"I know him."

"He used to work with Gino sometimes and I remember Gino telling me that he had killed several men. He was the one who called me. He said I wasn't to hire any private detective or try to find out anything about what Gino did before he died. He said they'd take care of me if I did. I was frightened and I didn't know where else to go, so I came here. I waited in the living room for a while," she said, "but then I got tired so I came to bed and waited for you. You aren't angry at me, are you?"

"Anger would hardly fit the situation," I said drily. "I still can't work for you, Mrs. Masagna—"

"Under the circumstances," she said with a giggle, "don't you think you might as well call me Margot?"

"Well, I still can't work for you, Margot," I said. "I'll have to think what we can do—"

"Don't be silly," she interrupted. "Just come to bed."

I thought about it for a minute and then followed her advice. I even forgot about my face hurting. . . .

I awakened the next morning to find myself alone in the bed. For a minute I thought she had left during the night, then I smelled coffee and frying bacon. I got up and put on my robe. I went into the bathroom and looked at my face. It still resembled a sombre rainbow but I'd be able to get around without too many questions to answer. I brushed my teeth and gingerly washed my face. Then I went into the kitchen.

She had put on one of my shirts, but that was all she was wearing. It made a nice morning picture. She had taken the bacon out of the pan and was putting eggs in.

"Good morning," she said. "How do you like your eggs?"

"Once over lightly," I said. I went over and patted her where the shirt ended. "Good morning yourself. You didn't tell me that you had all the talents."

She turned around to kiss me on the cheek and her eyes widened. "I didn't notice that last night. What happened to your face?"

"A friend of yours," I said, "didn't like the way it looked before. So he worked on it."

"A friend of mine?"

"Eddie Hanshew."

"He's no friend of mine," she said with a shudder. "I've always been afraid of him. Here, come and have your coffee while I finish the eggs." She poured me a cup of coffee and went back to the stove.

I sat down, put some sugar in the coffee and started sipping it. "What are you going to do, Margot?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe you'll still change your mind. If not I'll try to do it myself."

"Why don't you go back to New York?"

She came over, carrying the two plates of bacon and eggs. "No. It's too important."

"Money is never that important," I said.

She looked at me. "You—you know?"

"I know," I said, "that Gino was supposed to be carrying several hundred thousand dollars at the time he died and that nobody has found it yet. I can guess that's what you're after."

"I have a right to it," she said fiercely. "Why won't you help me find it?"

"Margot," I said gently, "I've got a bad shock for you, but you have to find out sooner or later and it might as well be from me. You don't have any kind of legal right to that money. You were never married to Gino Masagna."

"What do you mean? I can prove it."

I shook my head. "No, honey. Oh, you went through a ceremony. But Gino was already married and had been for two years before he pretended to marry you."

She stared at me, her eyes wide. "Is—is that true?"

"Yes. The best thing you can do is go back to New York and try to forget that it ever happened."

"I'm going to stay here," she said. "I've got a right to get something for the two years I spent with that—that—that ape. And I'm going to."

I finished my coffee and put the cup down. "We'll talk about it later," I said. "I have to go to work now. Make yourself at home. You'd better stay in here today and when I come home tonight we'll see what we can work out. Okay?"

"Okay," she said, but she sounded far away. She was tapping on the table with her nails and staring off into space.

I went in and showered. I managed to shave with a minimum of damage and then got dressed. When I looked into the kitchen she was still sitting in the same position I'd left her.

"Be sure to stay here all day," I said. "We'll talk about it when I get home tonight."

"All right," she said.

"I may be late," I told her. "There's plenty of food in the refrigerator, so fix your own dinner if I'm not home by that time. And don't answer the phone."

"All right," she said again. Then she suddenly seemed to realize that I was leaving and she jumped up and came over. "Thanks, Pete. You've been very sweet." She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me. It was a good thing she stopped when she did or I might not have gotten out when I did.

I gave her a final pat in the most natural spot and went downstairs. I took the gun with me, hidden under my coat, and when I got to the office I strapped on the holster and slipped the gun into it. I sat down at the desk and began to think of the job ahead of me.

Joyce had said that she was sure that nobody could have stolen anything from Gino's room after he died and that he hadn't put anything in the hotel safe, but I didn't want to leave it like that. I'd check it myself. And, remembering what the blonde upstairs had first asked me to do, there was another place to start. I pulled the phone over and dialed the number of the Police Department. When they answered, I asked for Lieutenant Weston. He came on right away.

"Pete Draco," I said. "How did Rolin City take your report?"

"They didn't like it," he said cheerfully, "but I think they'll leave it that way—unless you go up there and get spotted. You got something already?"

"No. I want something. Where are Gino's things? I mean what he had with him in the hotel."

"We've still got them. We'll probably turn them over to the widow within a few days."

"Can I look them over?"

"Sure. Come on down."

"I'll be there sometime in the next couple of hours. Thanks, Dick."

"Okay," he said. "Although sometimes I think you have the idea that this is a branch office of yours. See you later." He hung up.

I went out and got in my car. I made a U-turn and headed up toward the Hapsburg Hotel. Remembering that Eddie had apparently kept an eye on me the day before, I watched the rear view mirror. Sure enough, another car swung around and took out after me. I grinned to myself. I didn't care if they followed me to the hotel, but I was going to have something to say about what happened after that.

I left my car with one of the boys and went in. The manager was in his office. I introduced myself and showed him my license.

"I'm representing the widow of Gino Masagna who died here a few days ago," I said. "Mrs. Masagna is staying here now, so if you'd care to check with her it'll be easy."

He nodded and picked up the phone. He asked the operator to connect him with Mrs. Masagna. A moment later he was asking her if a Peter Draco was working for her. Then he apologized for bothering her and hung up.

"All right," he said. "What do you want?"

"Did Gino Masagna check anything in your safe while he was here?"

"No. I've already told the police and Mrs. Masagna the same thing."

"Just double checking," I said. "Can you tell me about the finding of his body?"

"Yes. One of our maids was passing his suite when she thought she heard a noise inside. She knocked on the door and when there was no answer she used her passkey to open the door. He was lying on the floor. She locked the door and came down to report it. I immediately went upstairs with our doctor. We let ourselves in and the doctor examined him. He was dead. The doctor said it was a heart attack. Apparently the noise the maid had heard was made when he fell."

"Why do you say that?"

"The doctor said he hadn't been dead more than fifteen minutes when he examined him. Of course, I didn't check the time, but I'd say that it took roughly twelve minutes from the time the maid discovered him until we were up there."

"Could someone have been with him at the time and left while the maid was getting you?"

"The police asked the same question," he said. "I suppose they could have, but we don't think so. Room service had delivered his breakfast about a half hour earlier. There was no one there then except Mr. Masagna, who seemed to be feeling fine. We checked the entire personnel of the hotel and we're pretty sure that no one went up to his suite after that."

"Something is missing from the things which we know Gino Masagna had with him," I said. "What about the maid?"

"Impossible," he said frostily. "She's been here for many years and wouldn't touch a thing. Besides, the police checked her most carefully and they were satisfied."

"Okay," I said. "What about after the doctor examined him and before the police came? Could someone have gotten in then?"

"I stayed in the room until the police came," he said. "I can assure you that no one came in."

"How did you happen to call the police since the doctor said it was a heart attack?"

"I was aware of Mr. Masagna's reputation and deemed it advisable."

"Smart of you," I said. "Well, thanks."

I went out and waited for my car. I pulled back into Collins Avenue and drove straight to police headquarters.

Lieutenant Weston was there. I went back to his office and we chatted for a few minutes. Then he sent a detective down to get Gino's things. He was back soon with two large suitcases and a big paper bag. He put them on the floor and left.

"Help yourself," Weston said, waving to an unused desk that was in his office.

I dragged the stuff over to the desk and went to work. I tried the suitcases first. They were full of expensive clothes, shaving lotions, toothpaste, deodorants. I went through everything pretty thoroughly, including checking both suitcases carefully for false bottoms or sides. Nothing.

Then I turned to the paper bag. I knew that would be the stuff that Gino had carried in his pockets or on himself. I turned it up over the desk and carefully shook everything out. Then I started through it. There was a watch and a diamond ring. A bunch of keys. Something that looked like a batch of photographs. I picked them up. They most certainly were. There must have been two dozen photographs, all of them nudes. And almost every one of them would have made Monroe look anemic. Art poses, they might have been called, although I don't suppose that Gino had them because he was an art lover. I recognized one of the pictures. It was the redhead who'd called on me the day before.

Finally, I put the pictures to one side. There was a package of cigarettes and four packs of matches, all of them from the Feathered Doll Club in Miami Beach. There was an airplane ticket from Miami to New York. A small black book. It was filled with names and phone numbers. Most of the names were those of girls. One of the names was Honey. Then there was a receipt for a new television set from a Miami Beach shop. I jotted down the name and the address.

There was a small gun and a handful of shells. That was all. I shoveled the stuff back into the paper bag and walked over to where Lieutenant Weston was working on a report.

"Find anything?" he asked pleasantly.

"You know damn well I didn't," I said.

"Fresh eyes," he said with a grin. "Did you copy down any of the phone numbers?"

"Too rich for my blood," I said. "I guess he liked women. Especially naked ones. Dick, what are you doing about finding the money?"

"Looking," he said. He grinned at me. But we haven't hit anything yet."

"Are you working with the Federal men?"

"Of course."

"What are they doing?"

"The same sort of thing we are." He smiled ruefully. "Frankly, Pete, we're all hoping that somebody like Big Jim will lead us to it. Gino's own people should have a better idea of what sort of precautions he usually took."

"I doubt it," I said. "Otherwise Big Jim wouldn't have had me picked up so he could ask me questions. And he wouldn't have tried to buy and then threaten me off."

"So that's what happened?" Weston said. "Maybe you're right. If he felt sure of himself, Big Jim wouldn't pay any attention to the likes of you.

I perched on the corner of his desk and lit a cigarette. "He's having me followed, too. And I've got an idea that the murder of that policeman in Rolin City fits in some way. Everybody is running scared in this race, which means that nobody, including Big Jim, has even the slightest idea where that money is. Incidentally, I'm told that the amount is probably five hundred thousand."

He whistled. "That's a nice round sum. You have any ideas, Pete?"

"Nothing worth any excitement. What about Gino having had the money with him and someone getting it out of his room after he died?"

"That was the first thing we thought of, but I think it's out. We checked the maid who had the best chance and we're all convinced that she didn't do anything except what she reported. The girls on the elevator swear that no one got off on that floor between the times the maid went down and the manager and doctor came up."

"What about somebody from the outside coming in and going to the floor above, then walking down? Or maybe somebody was with him when he died and took advantage of the situation?"

"Anything is possible," he said. "But the Federal men had the place staked out and they don't think anyone visited him that day."

"The Federal men were keeping a watch on him all the time?"

"Yes. They lost him for a few times during the three days after he arrived here from Cuba. If he did collect the money here, presumably it was during one of those lost times."

"What about the other times?"

"He didn't do anything unusual. Went to the races a couple of times. To the barbershop once. Spent a lot of time on the patio at the hotel. Saw a redheaded stripper named Honey Parker each night."

"You talked to the redhead?"

"Sure. And got nothing that we could use in any way."

"What about contacts with Big Jim Anderson?"

"So far as we know, he made none."

"Big Jim told me that he talked to Gino on the phone."

"Probably made those calls during the times the Feds lost him. All we can do is just keep watching everyone," he said. His mouth twisted humorously. "Including you. Incidentally, where is the blonde now?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"She was trailed to your place last night and wasn't seen coming out."

"You mean I have to shake off a whole parade," I grumbled. "She's still at my place. She was frightened after a threat by Eddie Hanshew."

"Are you going to represent her, too?"

"You know damn well I wouldn't do that. But I couldn't just throw her out for Eddie to grab up. I'm trying to convince her to go back to New York. Say, Dick, any chance that Gino could have wired that money on ahead to New York?"

"Not a chance. We checked all the telegraph services. I suppose he could have mailed it, but I doubt if he would. Just the same we've asked the New York Police to keep an eye out."

"Okay," I said. "I'll see you around."

I went downstairs and climbed into my car and drove away. I watched carefully for several blocks and made sure that I wasn't being followed.

I had only two minor clues and the possibility of another lead. One was the store where Gino had bought a television set, but that probably wouldn't mean anything. The police had probably been there. Another was the name on the matches. The Feathered Doll Club. If he had so many packs of matches with that name on it he might have been there. The third possibility was the stripper. Since I was refusing to work for her it might be difficult to get her to talk to me but I was going to try it. And I didn't want anyone peering over my shoulder while I did it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS ONLY a short drive to the radio and television store. I parked and went in. I showed my identification to the manager and told him what I wanted to know.

"The police," he said, "were already here and asked the same question."

"I'm sure they did," I said, "but I represent Mr. Masagna's widow. We know that he transacted some business while he was in Miami Beach but we have no idea exactly what."

"I wouldn't be involved in any of his kind of business," the man said defensively.

"Of course not," I said. "Naturally, I'm well aware of the reputation of the man my client was married to, but he did also have many business interests that were completely legal. It is those that we are interested in. And even the recipient of a present from him may lead us to something that was accomplished in these fields."

"I see," the man said, somewhat mollified. "I'll look it up for you." He went away and was back in about five minutes. "I'm afraid this won't help you much. Mr. Masagna bought a new color television set and had it delivered to a Miss Honey Parker. I believe she is a night club entertainer. I—I've read her name in the papers."

"Mr. Masagna was a man with a wide range of interests," I said gravely. "Could you give me the address on that?"

He checked the piece of paper in his hand and gave me the address of an apartment house just off the Venetian Causeway.

"Well, thank you," I said. I went back outside and got in the car. When I reached Collins Avenue I headed uptown. I turned in at the Hapsburg and turned the car over to the boys at the entrance. I went in and picked up a house phone. I asked for Joyce's room number. She answered on the second ring.

"Pete," I said.

"What a lovely surprise," she said. "I was just lying here thinking how many hours it would be before I would hear from you and then suddenly here you are. Incidentally, where are you?"

"Downstairs. How about coming down and having lunch with me?"

"Will I?" she said. "But I'm not dressed. It'll take me twenty or thirty minutes."

"Okay," I said. "Meet me out in the patio when you're ready."

"Why don't you come up?" she said.

"Uh-uh. That way we'd never get to lunch. Besides, I have some work to do down here before I meet you so twenty or thirty minutes will be about right."

"All right," she said. She sounded like she was pouting. I'll make it as fast as I can." She hung up.

I went back into the main lobby and looked around. I soon spotted the bell captain. He wasn't busy and I went over to him. On the way I took out a hundred-dollar bill. I walked up to him and pulled out my identification and held it where he could see it. Right next to the card that identified me as a private detective was the hundred dollars. He didn't pay much attention to the card but I had a feeling he was memorizing the serial number on the bill.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Draco?" he asked.

"That depends on you," I said. "You remember a guest here by the name of Gino Masagna? He died a few days ago."

"Yes, sir. I remember him."

"Just as a matter of curiosity, what was the largest tip he ever gave you?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Then I'm already a big spender," I said. "Do you think that maybe between the bellhops, the boys on the front door, the clerk and the girls on the elevators you could get me some information about visitors he might have had during the three days he was here on this trip? And if you can, I'd like anything on phone calls he made or received. Think you get something for me?"

His eyes went back to the hundred-dollar bill. "I could try, sir," he said. "It is just possible that they might know something, although I will have to do something about—taking up their time."

"Of course," I said drily, "I'm sure you can take care of it." I handed him the hundred-dollar bill. "There will be another one just like it if you get anything. I'm going to have lunch out on the patio. I'll look you up afterwards."

"Very well, sir," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

"I'm sure you will," I said and walked away. I went on out to the patio in the rear of the hotel. You could sit there and drink or eat while you watched the ocean or the kidney-shaped pool and the bathers. Most of the women bathers were showing too much too late,, but here and there I could see one who was worth looking at.

I picked a table that wouldn't cheat me out of the view and was on my second drink when Joyce finally arrived. I had to admit that even dressed she made most of the other women around fade completely out of the picture. I ordered her a drink.

"How come," she asked, "that I get the bonus of this lunch with you?"

"It's not really a bonus," I said. "I expect I won't make it for dinner tonight."

She made a face. "Why not? A date?"

"Work. That's what I'm supposed to do, remember?"

"Have you found out anything yet?"

"Nothing except that everybody wants the money."

She suddenly reached over and touched my face. "What happened to you, Pete?"

"Last night, after I left you, I had a small conference with some of your deceased husband's friends. Particularly Eddie Hanshew."

"Oh, my God, what did he do to you?"

"Nothing that won't be fixed up soon. I'll take care of that part of it. Forget all about it."

"Were you here this morning?" she asked. "When the manager called me?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact that's the only reason I'm back here now. And I just spent two hundred dollars of your money."

"What for?"

"Information, I hope. So far I'm not getting very far, honey. I went down to the police station and looked over Gino's things this morning. There wasn't anything there of interest—unless you're interested in pictures."

"Pictures?"

"Yeah. What are called art poses in some circles. In other words, nudes."

"Oh, yes," she said. "Gino's friends used to say that Gino would always put his money on a horse or a naked woman."

"Nice hobby," I said. "Do you suppose Gino lost the half million on the horses? He went to the races a couple of times."

"No. He was a heavy better but he wouldn't use money that belonged to the Syndicate. Not even on women. In many ways he was a fool but not that big a one."

"Okay, I guess we still have to find the answer the hard way."

"All right, Pete. I know you'll do the best you can."

We had a couple of more drinks and then some lunch. We both had brandy with our coffee and then I escorted her to the elevator. It had been a long lunch and it was then a little more than two hours since I'd spoken to the bell captain, so I went looking for him.

"How're we doing?" I asked when I found him.

"I have a few things for you," he said. "First, the phone calls. He made a few local calls each day. The operator thinks most of them were to a Jefferson number, but she doesn't remember it. He made one phone call to New York and one to Chicago. I've written the numbers down for you. And he made two calls to Fort Lauderdale. I've got that number for you, too."

"No calls to Rolin City?"

"No, sir. He didn't have many visitors, as far as we know. There was a young lady who was here a couple of times. Her name is Honey Parker. She's a stripper downtown."

"I know about her," I said.

"On the first day he was here, he was visited by a man who had checked into the hotel the day before Mr. Masagna arrived. He had a room two floors above Mr. Masagna's."

"How do you know about that?" I asked.

"Room service delivered an order while he was there. The waiter recognized the other man. He didn't know his name but he remembered the room number. I looked it up, but I don't think it'll do you much good. He registered as Joseph Smith. He gave his address as a hotel in New York City. He checked out that same day."

I nodded. I was thinking that he had probably been the man who delivered the money to Gino. It would have been a good way to avoid anybody keeping a watch on Gino. He could check into the hotel ahead of Gino and then go down to see him and any watching cops would be none the wiser.

"He had one other visitor while he was here," the bell captain went on. "It was also the first day. The visitor was a man, but I have no idea what his name was. He didn't ask at the desk and he didn't phone up. The girl in the elevator was curious about him and she waited when he got off. She saw him knock at Masagna's door. She described him as being about thirty, tall and good-looking. Not much of a description, I'm afraid."

"That's all?"

"Yes, sir."

"What about wires or mail?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Did he send any wires or any registered mail out?"

"Not through the staff, sir. The only other thing was that he made a reservation on Eastern Airlines for New York. That was done at the reservations desk."

"One more thing," I said. "Did the police get any of this same information that you just gave me?"

"Not that I know of, sir. I believe they talked only to the manager, the desk clerk and the maid on that floor. None of those would know about the visitors."

"Good. Let's keep it that way." I took a hundred dollars out of my pocket. "You have that list you made for me?"

He handed it over and I gave him the hundred dollars. He hadn't gotten anything very definite for me, but he'd still earned the money. I crossed the lobby to where there was a bank of public phone booths. First I took a look in the phone book. Honey Parker was listed and her exchange was Jefferson. So she was probably the person he'd made most of the local calls to.

I walked to the desk and got ten dollars worth of change and went back to the phone booths. I put in a call to the first New York number. When they answered it was a hotel. I didn't know what to ask them so I hung up. Next I tried the Chicago number. It rang and rang but nobody answered. I had a bright idea. I stepped out of the booth and went to the house phones. I asked for Joyce's room number.

"What's your phone number in Chicago?" I asked when she came on.

She told me. It was the same number I had written down.

"Gino called you—" I looked at the date the bell captain had written opposite the number, "the day he got in Miami Beach, didn't he?"

"Yes," she said. "He called to say he didn't know when he'd be home. He often did that just so if I happened to have found a friend while he was away I wouldn't know when I had to break it off. Why did you want to know?"

"Just curious," I said. "I'll see you, honey." I hung up and went back to the phone booth. I put in a call to the hotel in New York that was listed as being the permanent address of the Joseph Smith who had visited Gino.

"Do you have a Joseph Smith there?" I asked when the operator had connected me with the desk clerk in the hotel.

"Just a minute, sir," the clerk said. He was gone for a minute and then was back on the line. "I'm sorry, sir, but we have no Joseph Smith registered."

"When did he check out?" I asked.

"Just a minute," he said again. He was gone a little longer this time. "I'm sorry, sir, but there hasn't been a Joseph Smith registered here recently."

"Thanks," I said and hung up. It was about what I'd expected.

Next I phoned the Fort Lauderdale number. When a woman answered she identified it as the Tropical Palms Apartment House. I didn't have anything to ask her so I replaced the receiver.

I went out and got my car and headed north. When I came to Rolin City I went through it without stopping and I was careful to obey all the traffic laws. A few minutes later I was in Fort Lauderdale. I stopped at a drugstore and looked up the address of the Tropical Palms Apartment House in the phone book. A cop out on the street told me how to reach it.

The Tropical Palms looked like so many buildings in Florida. It was square, three storeys high, and of pink stucco. I parked in front of it and went inside.

There was a small lobby with a desk and a switchboard to one side. There was no one at the desk, but there was an apartment back of it and the door was partly open. I cleared my throat loudly and waited by the desk.

A moment later a woman came through the door. She was about thirty and plump and pretty. She was wearing an apron on which she was drying her hands.

"I'm sorry," she said with a smile, "but I was busy in the kitchen. What can I do for you? If it's an apartment, I'm afraid we don't have any vacancies. Of course, you could leave your name."

"It's not about an apartment," I said with an answering smile, "but perhaps you can help me. Do you manage the building?"

"Yes, my husband and I do."

"How about the switchboard? Do you answer it all the time?"

She nodded, looking puzzled.

"I'll tell you what it is," I said. "I represent a lady whose husband died of a heart attack in a Miami Beach hotel a few days ago. He was down here on a business trip and we have no way of knowing exactly what he had done before he died. We are trying to check up on everything he did so that it will be easier to settle his affairs."

"I guess you must be a lawyer," she said. She didn't stop there so I didn't bother correcting her guess. "That must be terrible for the poor woman. Of course, I'll give you any help I can, but I don't see how I can . . ."

"Her husband made a phone call from his hotel to this number a couple of days before he died. We know this from the hotel records but we don't know who he called. It might help a lot if we could find out."

"A call from Miami Beach," she said. "We don't get too many from there so I ought to be able to remember it. I don't know . . ."

"The call was made one week ago today. I don't know what time but it was probably in the afternoon."

"A week ago today. Let me see. Oh, I think I remember, Mr. —"

"Draco," I said.

"I think that I remember a call from Miami Beach that day. It was to Charles Hunter. He lives in 3-A."

"Who is Charles Hunter?" I asked.

"Oh, he's a very nice young man. He's been living here for almost two years. Alone. He's not married."

"I see," I said. "I wonder if you could tell me a little more about him. You know, what he's like, what he does, things like that."

"I guess he's about twenty-eight. Something like that. And he's very tall. Over six feet. I think he's very handsome but then my husband says that I think all men are handsome." She laughed. "He used to be a pilot in Korea—that's Mr. Hunter, not my husband. I think he still works as a pilot. Every few weeks he's gone for several days."

"Who does he work for?"

"I don't really know. He's always paid his rent promptly and I've never asked him. I guess it must be for some private plane company because he doesn't work every day."

"Is Mr. Hunter in?" I asked.

"No," she said. "In fact, I don't think he's been here since yesterday. He may be off on another trip. He got a phone call yesterday and went out and I haven't seen him since. He'll probably be back in three or four days. Maybe I could tell him to call you."

"I think I'll call him," I said with a smile, "but you might tell him that I was here and I'll phone soon."

"I'll do that. I'm sure he'll be back. I think he did fly some sort of private plane. I remember he mentioned Prospect Field once. That's right outside of Fort Lauderdale but it isn't being used any more so I guess that would mean that he wasn't flying any of the regular commercial planes, wouldn't it?"

"I think so," I said gravely.

"But I'll tell him you were here," she said. She twisted her head and looked up at me with a smile. "You're rather handsome yourself."

"Don't forget what your husband says," I told her. "I'll phone in a few days. And thank you."

I turned and went back out to my car. I started the motor and headed south.

I had an idea that I had stumbled on to something, although I wasn't sure it would help what I was trying to do. But it might make the cops happy. From what I'd heard I'd guess that Charles Hunter was the man who delivered the arms to Cuba after Gino and his friends had sold them. If that were right, it would mean that they probably had the guns already cached somewhere in Florida and once Gino had the money he called the pilot and told him what to deliver.

It was a sound theory, with only one thing bothering me slightly. Why had Charles Hunter gone into Miami Beach to see Gino after he received the phone call? Men of Gino's standing didn't usually have that much to do with the hired help.

I remembered something that the woman in the apartment house had said. I cursed and jammed on the brakes. I turned around and drove back into Fort Lauderdale. I decided not to go back to the house, but stopped at a drugstore and phoned the apartment building. She answered the phone after the fifth ring.

"This is Mr. Draco," I said. "I was just there talking to you about Charles Hunter, remember?"

"Of course I remember," she said. "Did you forget something, Mr. Draco?"

"I forgot to ask you something," I said. "You mentioned that Mr. Hunter left yesterday after receiving a phone call. Was that phone call a local one?"

"Why, no," she said. "It came from Rolin City. He often gets phone calls from there. Maybe that's where his girl friend lives."

"Maybe," I said. "Well, thank you again. Goodbye." I hung up before she could start talking again. I went out and headed south once more.

My next step was to take a look at the Feathered Doll and see what I could pick up. But it was too early to go to a place like that. I decided to pass the time at the Embers. I went in and had a couple of drinks at the bar. Then I got a table and ordered one of their fine steaks. I took my time over dinner and then almost as much time over coffee and a brandy. Finally, it was so crowded that I felt guilty about keeping the table. I paid the check and got up. I stopped at the phone booths and looked up the Feathered Doll. It was down on Washington. I went out, got in the car and drove downtown.

It would have been difficult to miss the Feathered Doll once I got within a block of it. There was a huge neon sign that advertised the name and that the place featured girls. Only it was GIRLS! I parked the car and went inside. There was already a considerable crowd there but I soon found a place at the bar. I ordered and then looked around.

There were a number of tiny tables, all crowded together, in such dim light that a man could sit next to his wife and not be able to recognize her. Which, I think, was the idea. There was a long bar and above and back of the bar there was a runway where the girls came out occasionally to do their numbers.

I sipped my drink and looked around, wondering why Gino Masagna would go to a joint like that. Somebody squeezed in beside me and I turned around. I saw a little, slight man with a dark face and black hair. He seemed concerned only with getting a drink so I paid no more attention to him. I was trying to figure out who to question when some music started up and the girls came out. Girls! They hadn't been girls in twenty years.

There were four of them and they did something that could have been called a strip, but was about as close as they could come to a stag show without someone calling the cops. But they seemed to make a big hit with the men at the bar and after a couple of encores they trooped off. Then a blonde came on. She looked a lot better than the first four and my interest picked up a little.

When the blonde finished I got a surprise. The next girl out on the runway was Honey Parker. I realized she was the reason Gino had been there. Things really picked up then. Honey Parker was not only stacked, she was a professional stripper and she practically tore the place apart. They brought her back at least ten times and the noise was still deafening when she finally went off and vanished through the rear of the club. That was the end of the show. Honey Parker was the star and deserved to be.

So now I knew why Gino had come to this place, but I decided to hang around anyway. I wanted to try to have a talk with Honey Parker and this might be as good a time as any.

"Señor," a voice said.

At first I didn't realize he was talking to me. When he repeated it I turned around. It was the little man who had squeezed in next to me.

"Speaking to me?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "You are the Señor Peter Draco, no?" He had a heavy Spanish accent.

"I'm Peter Draco," I said. Suddenly I was taking more interest in him. "How did you know me?"

"I have seen you, Señor," he said. "I have been wanting to speak with you. I was just passing and I recognized your car so I came to look for you. You are a private detective, no?"

"Yes."

"Then I wish to employ you—is that the correct word?"

"It's good enough," I said. "Why do you want to hire me?" I was beginning to be suspicious of everyone who wanted to hire me.

"I should like to tell you a story," he said. "It is an old story. There is a small country, Señor, ruled by a man who is not a good man. He treats most of the people very badly. Then one day there came a man who swore by all the saints that he would stop the bad man and throw him out of the country. Many good people came to his help and he went into the hills from where he began to fight the bad man who ruled the country. He was called an outlaw and so were all the people who fought with him—but there were many of them who went to him anyway and there were many more who wished in their hearts that he would win. It was civil war, Señor—even as you once had in your country."

I knew who he was now, but I only nodded and waited for him to go on.

"To fight the bad government," he said, "this good man had to have guns and bullets. But he was not a government so he could not just go to another country and buy these guns from the people who make them. He had to buy the guns where he could get them—which meant he had to deal with the outlaws of other countries, the criminals. You understand?"

"I understand."

"So he did this thing. He raised money to buy weapons to continue the fight for his country. Usually he bought these weapons from one group in your country, Señor. A man from this group would go see him and they would bargain on how many weapons he could get for the money that was had. Then he would send word to his friends and they would turn the money over to this same man and the guns would be flown to his country. Am I boring you, Señor?"

"Not at all," I said.

"So there comes a time," he continued, "when the man who was from this group comes back to this country and collects the payment for the guns which are to be delivered. But then he dies before he can turn the money over to his group and so they refuse to deliver the guns until they do get the money. No one knows where this money is. It is much money, Señor."

"So I've heard," I said. "What does that have to do with you wanting to hire me?"

"This man who is trying to save his country wishes to have you try to find the money for him," he said. "He and his friends are not wealthy but they will pay whatever you ask if you will do this."

"What's your name?"

"Manuel Moreno."

"How'd you happen to get interested in me?"

"There were many talks, Señor," he said. "There were some who wanted to just watch until someone else found the money and then to take gun and go get back what is rightfully ours. But it was decided that this was wrong; we should not break other laws of this country."

"It sounds to me as if you were afraid that the men who are selling the guns to you might just take the money under these circumstnaces and not deliver the guns to you."

"Such a thought has occurred to us," he said. "Since we are not yet an established government, the laws of this country—and of every other country—force us to deal with men such as the one who died. They do not care about the things for which we fight, so if they can get an advantage they will take it. It is true that we cannot trust them, Señor."

"You'd have a big job cut out for you if you went after them with guns," I said. "They play just as rough as your friend in Cuba does. I'm sorry, Manuel, but I can't work for you."

"Why not? Are you then a friend of the others?"

"No, but I already have a job which involves trying to find that money. I can't work on the same thing for two different people."

The little man drew himself up stiffly. "Then I am sorry that I have troubled you, Señor."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Just stick around a minute. I've got a couple of things to say."

"I will listen," he said stiffly.

"About the money," I said. "I know there's a lot of money involved—a half million dollars. I know that it took a lot of sweat and belief to raise that money. And there are a lot of people who want to get their hands on it. Not only you. There are the men Gino Masagna was in business with. There are three women who were mixed up with Masagna and think they have a right to the money. The Miami Beach cops want to get their hands on it. So do the Federal police. That's a lot of competition."

"You left out yourself, Señor," he said.

"No. I represent Gino Masagna's widow, who probably has the clearest claim on the surface. But even then it's not that simple. If Gino's friends get the money that will be the end of it. If almost anybody else gets the money I expect it will be thrown into the courts for a decision as to who it belongs to. If that happens, you can make your claim for the money."

"You think they will give it to us, Señor?" he asked scornfully. "One they are told the purpose for which it was to be used the government will take the money."

"I am hired to find the money, not to make certain that the lady gets to keep it," I said. "If you will answer three or four questions, I'll give you some advice."

"What questions?" he asked.

"Who is Joseph Smith?"

"I cannot tell you that, Señor. He is a man who believes in our cause and has done much good work for us. It is important that his name not be told."

"Okay. He was the man who delivered the money to Gino Masagna?"

"Yes."

"How was the money paid?"

"In one-thousand-dollar bills."

"Did he get a receipt from Masagna for the money?"

"Of course, Señor."

"Does the receipt say what the money was for?"

"No. It merely states that he received five hundred thousand dollars."

"Who is Charles Hunter?"

He hesitated, staring at me.

"Is he the man who's been flying the guns out of the States?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Gino Masagna, like all his friends," I said, "had invested a lot of his money in recent years in legitimate businesses. If I were you, in the event the money is found and turned over to the courts, I'd find out which one of his businesses would fit the story best and then I'd send a good front man in to claim that he'd handed the money over for a completely legal purpose. With the receipt signed by Gino Masagna, I'd guess you'd at least have a fighting chance of getting your money back."

He stared at me. "Why do you tell me this, Señor?"

"I told you I'm hired to find the money, not to help anyone to keep it. If your people have a right to it then I think you should get it. If not, you shouldn't. And like I said, if your boy does what he talks about then I'm for him. If not . . ."

"I understand, Señor," he said. "And I thank you." He slipped away from the bar and was gone.

It was about an hour later that the girls came out again, first the four tired ones, then the blonde and finally Honey Parker. This time while she was doing her number I managed to catch her attention. She recognized me although all she did was wink.

She'd been gone from the runway about five minutes when the bartender came over and told me I was wanted in the back. "The third door on the right," he added.

I finished my drink and strolled to the rear of the club. I went through the door there and found myself in a narrow corridor with doors on either side. I went down to the third door and knocked on it.

"Come in," a voice said.

I opened the door and stepped inside. It was a small dressing room, redolent of grease paint and powder. Honey Parker sat on a chair in front of a mirror. All she was wearing was a flimsy bra, a rhinestone G-string and a big rhinestone in her navel.

"Hello," she said. "How did you like it?"

"You were good," I admitted.

"Of course," she said complacently. She ran one hand over her breasts. "Do you think I am beautiful?"

"Yes," I said faintly.

"Did you come down just to see my number?" she wanted to know.

"No," I said. "I came down here for another reason. I didn't know this was where you worked until I saw you come out on the runway. But I do want to talk to you, so I waited once I saw you."

"You have changed your mind?"

"No, but I want to talk to you. When are you through?"

"It all depends. Tonight it'll probably be at two o'clock."

"Suppose I pick you up then?"

"All right."

"I'll see you then," I said, edging toward the door.

She stood up and walked over to the door. That walk, dressed as she was, was really something to see. When I finally pried my gaze back up to her face she was smiling.

"I'll see you then," she repeated. "Take care of yourself, baby." She opened the door and I stepped outside, all too conscious of how close she was. When she closed the door I got the first deep breath I'd been able to take in several minutes.

I went out through the club, past the bar, to my car. I had a few hours to kill before I had to pick her up so I drove uptown to the Hapsburg. If Joyce were there I'd have a few drinks with her.

Buck, as usual, was busy talking to a couple of customers—female. But he spotted me the minute I arrived at the bar and came over. He brought a bottle of VO with him and poured the drink before he even looked at me.

"Seen the brunette around?" I asked him.

"She was down at dinner time. Haven't seen her since."

"Alone?"

"Yeah. She had several offers while she was in here but she turned them all down. She looked like she was lonesome for you."

"Sure," I said. "I saw your redheaded friend work tonight."

"Nice, huh?" he said.

"Dangerous, too," I said. "I've got to make a phone call."

I went over to the house phone and gave the operator Joyce's room number. She answered right away, but her voice sounded sleepy.

"Pete," I said. "Were you asleep?"

"No. Reading. It's something I've had a lot of practice at the last four years. How nice of you to call."

"I'm downstairs and have a couple of hours to kill before I go back to work for you. Want to come down for a drink?"

"I don't suppose there's any point in asking you to come up?"

"Not when I still have work to do."

"I'll be right down," she said.

I put the receiver down and went back to the bar. Buck was serving someone but as soon as he'd finished he came over.

"She coming down?" he asked.

I nodded. "Buck, did you see much of Gino Masagna when he was staying here?"

"He was in a few times, but he wasn't much of a drinker. He liked the girls better."

"So I've noticed," I said drily. "Ever see him with anyone?"

"Only the redhead. The rest of the times he was alone. But he always had an eye out. And the boys tell me he had a pro come in one night late."

"You don't miss anything, do you, Buck?" I said. "Never saw him with any men?"

"No. I don't even know how he got around to having eyes for other women as long as he had that redhead. She looks like a full-time job."

"Maybe he liked working overtime. What did you think of him?"

"I wouldn't have ever wanted him to get angry at me."

"He ever show you his collections of pictures?"

"What kind?"

"Nudes. He had quite a collection of them in his pocket."

"He showed them," Buck said. "Then he showed me another one. He was on his way to see the redhead one night and he had this painting with him. He gave me a glimpse of it. It was a nude of the redhead. Wow!"

"Yeah," I said, remembering the way she'd looked in the dressing room.

"Here she comes," he said under his breath and got busy.

I looked around. It was Joyce. She came over and climbed on the stool next to me. "What a nice surprise to see you twice in one day," she said. "It almost makes up for missing you at dinner."

Buck came over to give her a drink and then went away again.

We spent the next two hours slowly drinking and doing a lot of talking. Most of it was fun. Finally when it was a few minutes before two I told her I had to leave. I settled the check with Buck and walked her to the elevator. I went out and got in my car and drove downtown.

The club wasn't as crowded as it had been when I was there before. I walked through to the back and went back to her dressing room. I knocked.

"Come in," she called.

I opened the door and got a shock. She was completely dressed.

"I'm all ready," she announced.

"I almost didn't recognize you with all those clothes on," I said. "Let's go."

We went back through the club and out to my car. I helped her in and went around to slide beneath the wheel.

"Where would you like to go?" I asked.

"There isn't much of any place to go to this time of night," she said. "Why not just take me home? I have some VO there and it'll be more comfortable than some bar."

"Okay," I said. I started the car and headed for the Venetian Causeway.

Neither of us talked on the drive, but we were soon there. I parked in front of the building and followed her inside. We went through a small lobby and then up an outside stairway to the second floor. She unlocked the door and we stepped inside and she flicked on the lights.

It was quite an apartment. I could see beyond the living room were were in and it looked as if there were four or five rooms. The living room was huge and luxuriously furnished. But one of the first things I saw was a large nude oil painting of Honey on the wall. The artist was good; he'd caught all the lushness and sensuality of her body.

"You like that?" she asked, noticing what I was looking at. "Gino gave it to me."

"I like it," I said. I looked around the room. Over against one wall there was the new television set. Blonde wood. "Gino also give you the TV set?"

"Gino gave me everything in here," she said. "He paid the rent, too. It's paid up for the next six months."

"Do you make enough money to keep it up then?" I asked.

"I make enough but I spend it too," she said. She shrugged. "But something will turn up. Sit down and I'll get you a drink."

I dropped into a chair that was so soft I thought I wouldn't stop sinking, and she disappeared through a door which I guessed led to the kitchen. There was the sound of ice cubes being dropped into glasses. A moment later she was back with two huge drinks. It was fortunate, I thought, that I'd been drinking slowly all evening.

"Excuse me a minute," she said and vanished through a door in the opposite direction.

I got out a cigarette and lit it. I waited, glancing around the room. Gino had certainly spent a lot of money on fixing up her apartment. It wasn't all in the best of taste, but it was expensive. I guessed that a hobby like Honey Parker could run into quite a lot of money.

She came back within a few minutes. She had changed clothes and was now wearing a pair of lounging pajamas. They were so sheer I didn't even have to imagine that she wasn't wearing anything under them. I started getting nervous again.

She sat on the couch and picked up her drink. "Come and sit beside me," she said, patting the couch.

"I'll stay here if you don't mind," I said. "I want to talk to you and it'll be a lot easier from here."

She laughed softly. "You're a little bit afraid of me," she said in delight. "And we could be such good friends."

"I couldn't afford you," I said honestly.

"Who cares about money," she said. "If I like a man it wouldn't make any difference whether he had money or not." The conversation was taking a turn slightly different than I had planned.

"Did you ever tell that to Gino?" I asked.

"Gino," she said with scorn. "He was a pig. I didn't like him, but I did like his money. I do like you, so you don't need money. There you are!"

"I've been wondering where I was," I said. "How long did you know Gino?"

"About two years, I guess," she said. "Do we have to talk about him?"

"Yes," I said firmly.

"Oh, all right," she said. She jerked her body in petulance and everything bounced.

"Did you see him often?"

"Pretty often. Whenever he was down this way. And when he was here I usually saw him every night."

"Did you know he was married?"

"Sure, but he had enough money for both of us."

"Did he buy you many things besides the furniture in this apartment?"

"A few things," she said. "Some jewelry, a car and a plane."

"A plane?"

She giggled. "Isn't it silly? He gave it to me this trip. He said it was so I could come and visit him."

"What kind of plane?"

"I don't know," she said. "It's a four seater. That's all I know about it."

"Where is it?"

"Gino rented space for it out at the Miami airport."

"Do you fly?" I asked.

"Only when I'm high," she said with a laugh. "Gino said he was going to hire a pilot to take me anywhere I wanted to go, but I guess he didn't get around to it before he died."

I wondered if that was why he'd called the pilot in Fort Lauderdale and had him come to the hotel. "Honey, why did you want to hire me?"

"I just wanted you to do something for me. I still do if you'll take it."

"Something like trying to find some money?"

"How did you know about it?" she demanded.

"Everybody knows about it. The cops, both city and Federal, and all of Gino's pals. That's a tough bunch to buck. You'd better forget about the money."

"Why?" she asked sullenly.

"It should be obvious," I said. "First, you might easily get hurt just trying to look for it. Then if you found it you certainly wouldn't be able to keep it if anyone knew you had it."

"Why not?"

"Lots of people have a better legal claim to it than you do. Including the government. How did you happen to know about it?"

"Gino told me he was carrying a lot of money. Enough to make someone rich, he said."

"But how did you know it wasn't found when he died?"

"I figured out it was missing," she said. "There wasn't anything in the news story about him carrying a lot of money and I was sure there would have been if they'd found it."

"What do you think Gino did with the money?"

"He probably hid it somewhere. He was pretty shrewd and he didn't trust anybody, so I guessed he might have hidden it somewhere."

"Any idea where?"

"No. That's why I wanted to hire you."

I fished out another cigarette and searched for a match. I didn't have any. I looked at the coffee table. There was a glass dish with several packs of matches in it. I picked out one and lit my cigarette.

"What—" I started, then I stopped. I'd been staring at the pack of matches without really seeing it, but suddenly the print swam into focus. They were from The Tropics Bar in Rolin City. That was the same bar where I'd run into Fred Kane the night before.

"Where did these matches come from?" I asked her.

"The matches?" she said frowning. "Oh, I think that's a bunch of matches Gino dumped in the dish the last night he was here. The night before he died."

I reached down and pulled the dish to me. I started looking through the matches. There were several more from The Tropics Bar, a couple with national advertising on them, several from the Feathered Doll and two packs from the Hapsburg Hotel.

"What's with the matches bit?" she asked.

"Just curious," I said. I slipped the one pack into my pocket and pushed the others back. "Well, Honey, thanks for everything. I guess I'd better get moving."

"No," she said. "You can't leave so quickly. We just started getting to know each other."

I took another look at those pajamas she was wearing and knew that I'd better be firm and quick about it. "Yes," I said. "I'm a working man and I can't sleep all day. I'll come around and see you soon. The first time I have a day off and don't have to worry about getting up the next day. I've got to go now."

She stood up and walked to the door with me. When we reached it, she wrapped her arms around my neck and crushed her mouth against mine. She pressed her body tightly to mine and I had a feeling somebody ought to turn in a fire alarm.

She pried herself loose and laughed. "That's just a sample until you do come back," she said. "Good night."

"Good night," I muttered and got out of the door as quickly as I could. Another kiss like that and the shells in my gun would start going off from spontaneous combustion.

Downstairs, I got into my car and headed for home. When I got there I parked in front of the building and let myself into the office. I went into the small bathroom next to the office and washed the lipstick from my face. I still had the problem of the blonde who was upstairs and I had a feeling it would be more difficult to solve if I showed up covered with lipstick.

Then I went upstairs, flicking off the office light. The apartment was dark. She must have left or gone to bed. But she'd promised not to leave so she was probably asleep. I turned on a light and tried not to make too much noise as I put my coat and the gun in the closet. I'd had enough to drink so I didn't go into the kitchen. I took a quick shower and turned out the living room light.

I slipped into the bedroom and felt my way across the room to the night table. I switched on the light and turned to look at her.

She was there all right. Stretched out on the bed in the same position she'd been in the night before. But now there was one big difference. There was a small hole in her forehead, with a dark streak of dried blood bisecting her cheek. She was dead.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SEVERAL MINUTES passed while I stood there staring, my mind refusing to accept what my eyes saw. It seemed so impossible. She'd been so very alive when I'd left that morning and there had been no reason why anyone should have killed her. At least, no reason that I knew of. But someone had murdered her.

I went back into the living room and picked up the phone. Then I put it down. I didn't know anyone who would be at the station at this time of night. It was three-thirty. I got out the phone book and looked up the home number of Lieutenant Weston. I picked up the phone and dialed the number.

It rang six times before the receiver was picked up at the other end. Then Weston's voice, thick and fuzzy with sleep, answered.

"Dick, this is Pete," I said. "I'm sorry to call you in the middle of the night, but it's important. Remember we were talking about the blonde being at my place?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I just got home and found her on the bed with what looks like a bullet hole through her head. She's dead."

"What else?" he asked sharply.

"That's all. I called you the minute I discovered her. I haven't taken time to look around."

"All right. We'll be right there. Leave everything as it is." He hung up.

I put the receiver down and stared around the room. Then I decided the first thing I'd better do was get dressed. I put my clothes on and then I began prowling around the apartment without touching anything. But I couldn't see a thing that was unusual or out of place. She'd obviously made her own dinner and washed the dishes. They were still in the drainer. Some time she'd had a drink. The glass was still on the table with a quarter inch of whiskey in it. In the living room there were a couple of books out on the coffee table. She must have been looking at them; but that was all.

I made myself a drink, lit a cigarette and sat down to wait for the police to arrive.

It didn't take them long. I was on my third cigarette when the bell sounded. I went and let them in.

It was Lieutenant Weston, the sergeant I'd met with him before, and three other men. No time was wasted in introductions. I showed them where the body was and they went to work. Weston stayed in the bedroom for a few minutes, then he came back to the living room and joined me.

"Tell me about it, Pete," he said.

I told him what I knew, which didn't take long.

"Okay," he said. "You touch anything?"

"Not since I discovered it. Before that I touched the door, the light switch, the closet door when I hung up my coat, the bathroom door and the table lamp in the bedroom. Then the phone afterward. That's it."

"Okay. I guess we just wait now."

We waited until one of the men came out of the bedroom. "One shot through the brain," he said to Weston. "Can't be sure until we get a lab report but I think it's a thirty-eight. It happened about twelve o'clock, midnight, give or take a few minutes either way."

"Was she shot in there?"

"Yes. On the bed where she was lying."

"Okay," Weston said.

The man left and we waited again. Finally, the other two men came out. They went over the rest of the apartment methodically, dusting everything and taking prints. They had almost finished when the bell rang again. I went to the door and let in the two men with a basket. Weston nodded at them and pointed to the bedroom. They went in and a few minutes later they walked out with her.

"What was your schedule tonight, Pete?" Weston asked then.

"I went to the Feathered Doll about nine-thirty and left shortly after eleven-thirty. I went straight to the Hapsburg Hotel. I left there shortly before two and went back to the Feathered Doll. I was with Honey Parker from then until I left to come home."

"Anybody see you at the Hapsburg?"

"Sure. The bartender and Mrs. Masagna."

"Well, you're probably in the clear," he said, "but just to play safe let me take your gun and have ballistics check it. You can pick it up again in the morning."

I went to the closet and took out the gun. I handed it over to him. "I'll come down for it in the morning. I may need it before long."

"Okay," he said. He looked at his men and saw that they were through. "See you in the morning, Pete." He got up and the four of them left.

Well, that was that. I looked at my watch. It was almost five in the morning. I went into the kitchen and made myself a good stiff drink. I sipped it and wandered around the apartment. Once I went into the bedroom and looked at the bed, but decided that I wasn't hard-boiled enough to sleep in it this soon. I went back to the living room. I turned off all the lights except one small lamp and stretched out on the couch with a drink and a cigarette.

Some time later I fell asleep.

I woke up about ten that morning. It hadn't been enough sleep but I had too many things to do. I felt horrible. My mouth was dry and fuzzy—like a Martini made with sawdust instead of gin—and my eyes weren't much more than two burned holes. I staggered into the kitchen and got some coffee going. Then I went in and had a good hot shower. I shaved quickly, noticing that the bruises were faded slightly, then went in and had my coffee. I followed the coffee with a couple of drinks on the rocks, which I sipped. Then two eggs and some bacon and I began to feel as if I might be able to cope.

I went into the living room and picked up the phone. I dialed the number of the business office of the phone company. I identified myself to the girl who said she was my business representative and told her I wanted to know what calls had been made the day before from my phone. She told me to wait a minute and then was gone.

"Mr. Draco," she said, when she came back, "there were three calls from your phone yesterday."

Maybe I had something. I'd only made one call the day before. My call to the lieutenant had been made after midnight so wouldn't have been charged to the day before.

"Can you tell me to what numbers the three calls were made?" I asked.

"I'll have to call you back," she said.

"Okay."

"It'll take about thirty minutes . . ."

"I shall wait impatiently to hear your lovely voice again," I told her solemnly.

She tittered—as only unreconstructed Southern Rebel belles can. "I'll call you, Mr. Draco."

I hung up the phone and got dressed. Then I sat around, waiting for the phone call. It came about five minutes later than the girl had said it would. She gave me two telephone numbers that had been called from my phone the day before. There had been two calls to the second number. The first number was that of the police. That was the call I'd made in the morning before I'd left. The second number—the one the blonde must have called twice—was a Rolin City exchange. I didn't recognize it.

I had a hunch about it. I looked in the Rolin City directory. It was the number of Big Jim Anderson. I put the directory away and went out to the car. I got in and headed for the police station. Checking the rear view mirror, I could see I had company again. It looked as if two cars were following me.

Lieutenant Weston was in. He was sitting at his desk going through some papers and looking as if he'd lost his last friend. He just grunted at the sight of me.

"I came down to pick up my gun," I said. "You through with it?"

"Sure," he said. He opened a drawer in his desk and took out the gun.

I picked it up and slipped it into my holster. "Any luck?" I asked.

"She wasn't shot with your gun," he said sourly. "That ought to be enough luck for you."

I grinned down at him. "I guess that answers my question. You didn't dig up any prints in my place, I gather."

"Plenty of them—belonging to either you or her."

"What else have you done?"

He glanced at me. "Under the circumstances we had Eddie Hanshew and Johnny Lane checked this morning. They both had alibis for the entire night."

"Who checked for you? The Rolin City police?"

"No. I had the sheriff do it. He's not in Big Jim Anderson's pocket. They were playing poker all night with Big Jim and two other men."

"Honest citizens, I presume?"

"As honest as Big Jim can buy," he grunted. He finally pushed the papers to one side and looked at me. "What were you doing in Fort Lauderdale yesterday?"

"How did you find out?"

"You went up and were asking a lot of questions about a Charles Hunter. Why?"

"Gino made a call to him from the hotel and I think this Hunter came down to see him. I thought I might learn something about what Gino was doing those few days before he died. But I didn't get to talk to Hunter because he wasn't around."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," I said. "What is this?"

"Charles Hunter was killed day before yesterday."

That caught me by surprise and I just stared at him.

"In Rolin City," he said. "The same day that the policeman Fred Kane was killed. The Rolin City police say that both men were killed by the same gun."

"So they think I killed both of them, is that it?" I said. "What do you think?"

"They do have some sort of idea like that," he said. "I've asked them to send me whatever they have ballistically."

"So you can check it with my gun?"

"I'll do that, too," he said. "But I'll bet you a box of cigars that it'll turn out that the same gun killed the blonde in your apartment."

"That's an interesting thought," I said. "Where does it leave you?"

"You know damn well where it leaves me," he said savagely. "Exactly nowhere. But it opens up some interesting possibilities if a Rolin City cop, an itinerant plane pilot and one of Gino's women were all killed by the same gun."

I thought so, too. "So a cop and a pilot figure somewhere in the missing money," I said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"There isn't much that I can," he said. "One of the three people was killed in my territory. The other two were killed up in Broward County. I can't do much up there, but I can pass it along to the Federal men and maybe they can do something about it."

"How did you find out about Hunter?"

"Came in from Fort Lauderdale. They found out that you'd been there asking questions about Hunter. Funny though, they had the idea you were a lawyer."

"The girl at the apartment house jumped to that conclusion and I didn't bother to correct her."

"I seem to be spending half of my time explaining to other police departments that you're not a killer," he grumbled. "I might not have paid too much attention to the name of Hunter except that I already knew that the Feds were interested in him."

"Why?"

"He's one of their suspects. They think he's been flying guns into Cuba and flying aliens back here."

"You think he's been working for Gino and his pals?"

"Could be," the lieutenant said. "But there's no proof. And now I guess there won't be."

"So Gino could have been seeing Hunter about flying the arms down to Cuba," I mused.

"I guess so," he said. "Why do you suppose he was killed?"

"Maybe he made a bad landing," I said irritably, because I didn't know the answer. "Well, thanks, Lieutenant. I guess I'll be running along."

I got into my car and drove off. The two cars were still following me, but I didn't try to do anything about it immediately. Miami Beach is too narrow to be an ideal place to lose a tail. I waited until we'd crossed the causeway to Miami. Then I went to work on it. Within ten blocks, partly due to crashing a red light at just the right moment, I had lost them. Once I was sure, I headed for the Miami airport.

I had to see three men before I finally reached one who knew about the plane that Honey Parker owned.

"Yes," he said. "Miss Parker does keep her plane here. It's a two-engined Cessna."

"How long has it been here?" I asked.

"I believe it's about a week. It's a new plane. Arrangements were made in advance and then the plane was delivered here."

"Has she used it since it was delivered?"

"I don't believe so," he said. "There was some work ordered on it after it was delivered and I don't believe it could have been used."

"What kind of work?"

"I'm not certain. I can find out for you."

"Okay, but I'd like to know a few other things. Who reserved the space for the plane?"

"I imagine that Miss Parker did."

"Don't you know?"

"No . . ."

"Can you check and find out?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. He got up and left the desk. He came back a few minutes later with a thin folder. "It seems that the actual ordering of the hangar rental was made by a friend of Miss Parker's. A Mr. Gino."

"That's what I thought," I said. "Did he pay advance rental?"

"Yes. For one month."

"How?"

"In cash."

"Who ordered the work on the plane?"

He looked in the folder. "That was ordered and paid for by Mr. Gino also. Incidentally, I see that the work was to install additional gas tanks on the plane."

"Why?"

"We weren't told, but I'd imagine that it meant that a rather long flight was planned."

"Did Miss Parker have a pilot?"

"I don't know," he said.

"What about the installation of the gas tanks?" I asked. "Did someone here oversee that?"

"Yes. Gene Craig. A good man."

"Could I talk to him?"

"I guess so," he said. "You'll find him down in Hangar Three." He wrote out a pass and handed it to me. "I doubt if he can tell you anything that isn't in the records."

"Probably not," I agreed, "but I'd like to talk to him anyway. Thanks." I went out and found somebody who told me how to get to Hangar Three. There were several planes being worked on in the hangar and I found Gene Craig inspecting one of the planes. I introduced myself and asked him if he remembered putting the extra tanks on a two-engined Cessna.

"Sure," he said. "It's over in Hangar Seven."

"I know the work was ordered through the office," I said, "but didn't the owner ever come around to inspect the job or at least see that it was being done?"

"Not the owner," he said. "The pilot was around once to see that it was being done and on time. It was a rush job. Funny about that. The ship was supposed to be ready to fly several days ago and it was, but then nobody came around to take it out."

"The pilot?" I asked. "You wouldn't happen to remember who he was?"

"A guy named Hunter."

"You knew him?"

"Never saw him before. He introduced himself and he had a letter from the owner. That was enough for me. Why, is there something wrong with it?"

"Nothing wrong," I said drily. "Any idea where they were going to go with the plane?"

He shrugged. "Nobody told me anything about that."

"Did you ever see the owner?"

"No."

"You missed something," I told him. "Well, thanks."

I went out to the parking lot and got into my car. I sat there for a minute, trying to fit the pieces together. Gino had bought a plane in Honey Parker's name and had it outfitted for a long trip. He'd hired Charles

Hunter to fly the plane. Maybe Hunter had been the pilot for the gunrunning, but I had a hunch that this had nothing to do with the Syndicate. They would have had better fronts for the ownership of a plane than Honey Parker and I doubted if Gino's partners would have agreed to using her. It sounded more like a private plan of Gino's. But what did it have to do with the missing half million dollars? I couldn't see any direct connection, but I was beginning to get a glimmering idea.

I went back into the terminal and found a phone booth. I called Lieutenant Weston.

"Pete," I told him when he came on the phone. "Do you think you could find out anything about the state of Gino's bank accounts in New York or Chicago?"

"Maybe," he said. "But what's that got to do with the missing money and the three murders?"

"I don't know," I said honestly. "But I have a feeling it might fit in somewhere."

"You think he deposited the missing money in one of his accounts?"

"I don't know, Dick. Just call it a hunch and try to get the information."

"All right, but if the city ever finds out how much work I do for you I'll be back pounding a beat. Or out of work."

"I'll always give you a job," I said. I hung up but not before I'd heard what he called me.

I went back out to the car and started driving north. Part of the answer, I'd decided, had to be in Rolin City. If the murders of the cop and Charles Hunter had anything to do with it then an important part of the answer was there. If I could find out why they'd been killed I might have a better idea of what had happened to the missing money. Rolin City was probably not the safest place for me, but I'd have to take a chance on that.

It was about noon when I reached Rolin City. I didn't remember the exact address but I drove around until I spotted The Tropics Bar. I parked and went in. Along one wall there were a string of tables with red and white checked tablecloths on them. There were four people sitting at tables and having lunch. Two more men stood at one end of the bar. The place wasn't exactly booming.

I went down to the other end of the bar. The bartender, the same one that had been on that night, shuffled over. I could tell by the way he looked at me that he recognized me, but he didn't say anything as he poured my drink.

When he came back with the change I offered to buy him one. Without saying anything he reached back for a bottle of rye and poured himself a drink, pulling enough money from my change to pay for it.

"You work day and night both?" I asked.

He nodded. "I own the place," he said. "Can't hire a bartender who won't steal me blind, so I do it myself." He gazed at me curiously. "You've got your nerve coming back here after what happened."

"Which do you mean? What happened inside or what happened later outside?"

"They say it was you both times."

"What do you think?" I asked.

"I don't think, mister. In this business you have less trouble if you don't do any thinking. I don't like trouble."

"A sound philosophy," I said. "You read the newspapers?"

"Yeah," he said.

"Do you remember reading about a man named Gino Masagna who died down in Miami Beach a few days ago?"

He nodded. "I guess when your time comes it don't help any to be a big shot."

"Ever see him before?" I asked.

He brought out a rag and polished the bar. "I see a lot of people of all kinds here. You don't expect me to remember them all, do you? Why are you asking?"

"I'm just a curious guy," I said. I reached in my pocket and took out a twenty-dollar bill. I put it on the bar. "I have a lot of funny little quirks. I'd like you to take this twenty dollars and start a Fund for Indigent Drinkers. A man shouldn't have to be dry because he's broke."

He took the twenty dollars and tucked it in the pocket of his shirt, continuing to stare at me without saying anything.

"Gino Masagna," I said, "had a bunch of your matches which I figure he must have gotten when he was here. The papers published plenty of pictures of Gino Masagna. If he was here, I figure you would remember him."

He polished the bar silently for a minute. "He was here," he said finally. "One night a couple of days before he died."

"Did he meet anyone here?"

"Fred Kane."

"The cop?"

"Yeah. Fred was what you might call a regular customer. Used to come around and get likkered up most every night. He liked his whiskey, Fred did. They sat at that back table over in the corner."

"Just the two of them?"

"At first. Then later that airplane pilot who was killed the other day came in and was with them."

"Was he a regular customer, too?"

He shook his head.

"Then how did you know that's who it was?"

"Didn't at the time. Didn't know any of them then except Fred. But I recognized him from the picture they published in the paper here when he was killed. It was the same guy."

"How long were they here?"

"Maybe an hour."

"Got any idea what they talked about?"

"Nope," he said. He hesitated a minute. "But I figure some money changed hands for something."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, just before they left, this guy gave Fred and the pilot both something that looked like envelopes. And the next day Fred wanted me to change a hundred-dollar bill for him. I don't reckon Fred Kane ever saw a hundred-dollar bill before in his life, so where else would he get it?"

"Makes sense," I said. "Tell me, do Eddie Hanshew and Johnny Lane come in here?"

"Not that I know of. Never heard of them."

"Big Jim Anderson?"

He shook his head. "I've read about him, but he don't come in here. Mostly I get just local trade in here. It ain't special enough for others. That's why I happened to notice that guy when he came in and met Fred that night."

"But Fred was a regular customer?"

"Sure. Fred was born and raised around here. If there's such a thing as a dyed-in-the-wool cracker, Fred was one."

"You knew him long?"

"As long as I've had this place. He was always a mean one. Used to come in here and nurse a few beers all night unless somebody would start buying for him. Then he got on the police and he had more money. Was meaner, too."

"How do you mean?"

"Liked everybody to know he was a cop and thought he ought to be treated special. Fred was a great one for picking fights, too. I guess there was a lot of men at the bar that night who got a kick out of what you did to him. Here at the bar, I mean. I don't reckon anyone wanted to go as far as it did later."

"Somebody did," I pointed out, "and it wasn't me. Was that the only time that Gino Masagna was in here?"

"Yes."

"What about the pilot?"

"Never saw him before either."

"Tell me," I said, "do you know that the Rolin City police are owned by Big Jim Anderson?"

"I've heard it," he said carefully.

"Anybody else on the force come in here?"

"No. Fred was the only one."

"Okay," I said. "I guess I might as well have lunch here. How's the food?"

"It's all right," he said. "The chili's pretty good. I make it myself."

"Then I'll try the chili. Give me another drink and then I'll go over to one of the tables."

He poured my drink and I paid him. Then I walked over to one of the tables. A doddering waiter in a slightly soiled coat came over and took my order.

One thing seemed clear to me after talking to the bartender. Gino had been conducting some sort of private business with Charles Hunter and Fred Kane, even though both of them may have worked for the Syndicate. The place of meeting indicated that if nothing else did. But what kind of business? Had Gino been planning some sort of double-cross on his partners? If he had, that might explain why both Kane and Hunter had been killed, but it didn't put me any nearer to knowing where the missing money was.

My chili came and I started eating it. The bartender had been right; it was good. I had almost finished it when somebody took the chair across from me. I looked up. It was Eddie Hanshew.

"Hello, sucker," he said. "Where've you been?"

"Were you one of the tails I shook this morning?" I asked.

"What do you mean, one?" he demanded. "I was following you, sure. You got a lucky break at that traffic light. If it hadn't been for that squad car on the other side of the street . . ."

"I make my own luck," I said. "How'd you find me here?"

"I guess you forgot to make some luck," he said laughing. "I was just driving down the street when I spotted your car. So I looked in each joint along here until I saw you."

"I'm thrilled," I murmured. "However, I don't remember inviting you to sit with me so get lost."

"When I'm ready," he said. "Where'd you go this morning?"

"That's my business."

"Maybe I'm making it mine."

"You wouldn't like it," I told him. "It's too honest."

"Still talking big," he said. "Especially for a guy who doesn't carry a gun."

"I'm carrying one now," I said evenly, "so if you think you can take me, start whenever you feel like it. I have a few things to settle with you and it might as well be now as later."

His face tensed and for a minute I thought he was going to take me up on it. Then he relaxed and laughed. "I don't have to bother," he said. "There are others who want you, too." He stood up. "So long, sucker. Maybe I'll come around and watch when they put you away for good." He walked off toward the door.

I twisted around in my chair to watch him and then I knew why he'd said what he had. The big fat Rolin City cop, Lieutenant Hennessey, was headed directly for me. Another cop was trailing along behind him.

"Well," the lieutenant said, coming up to me, "I didn't think you'd be dumb enough to come back here. Maybe I had you figured wrong."

"Maybe you still do," I said. "I suppose Eddie Hanshew called you and told you where to find me."

"Who?" he asked innocently. "All I know is that some public-spirited citizen phoned us."

"What do you want?" I asked, as if I didn't know.

He put his hand on the gun that hung at his hip. "I'm taking you in for the murder of Fred Kane."

CHAPTER NINE

For a minute I was tempted to go for my gun and to hell with the chances, but then I knew it wouldn't be smart. Maybe they were crooked cops, but they were still cops so I couldn't plead any self-defense. It didn't leave me much choice.

"You're way off base, Hennessey," I said. "I had a fight with Kane, right in here, but I didn't kill him."

"We figure differently," he said calmly. "We got the idea that you killed Fred and that other fellow who was killed here the same day. They were both killed with a .38 and I hear that's what you carry." He reached over and flicked back my coat. Then he pulled the gun from my holster.

"If you check my gun you'll find that it wasn't my gun."

"Maybe," he said, "you used another gun. Besides I don't go much for all that science stuff. I figure there are other ways to find out if a fellow's a killer or not."

I'd already had a taste of his other ways and I didn't care for them.

"Come on," he said.

"I want to call my lawyer."

"Sure," he said. "Just as soon as we get you booked. The law says that's your right and we're very law-abiding in Rolin City. Now, come on with you."

I took out enough money to cover the check and the tip and stood up. I looked over at the bar but the bartender was keeping himself busy and not even looking at us. I turned and walked out with the two cops following.

"You got your car here?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes."

"I'll ride with you," he said. "Jed, here, can bring the squad car along behind us."

We climbed into my car and I drove according to his instructions. It was only about ten blocks to the pink stucco police station. The squad car parked right behind me. I got out and the two cops escorted me inside. The man in rumpled blue pants and shirt was at the desk, looking about as busy as he had the other time I'd been there.

"Let's just go on to the back," the lieutenant said amiably. "I reckon you know the way."

"I want to make that phone call," I said.

"Oh, sure, you can make that just as soon as we book you."

"Then book me."

"Not just yet," he said. He grinned, showing stained teeth. "We got to ask you a few questions first so that we know what this is all about. Maybe you're innocent like you say. Now, just go on back to my questioning office."

I walked ahead of him back along the corridor until he told me to stop. He threw open the door and I walked into that same room, with its single chair and the strong overhead light.

"You can't get away with this," I told him. "One way or another, I'll get you for it if it takes me the rest of my life."

"The way you got Fred?"

"The way I got him in the bar, if that's the only way I can do it," I said. "But that's as far as I went with Kane."

"Now, that's what we're going to find out," the lieutenant said. "You sit down, son." He waited until I was sitting on the chair, then turned to look at the other cop. "You hand me my tools, Jed. That bending over is just a mite hard on me."

The other cop bent and picked up a police club and one of the dirty towels. He gave them to the lieutenant who began wrapping the towel around the club.

"Now this here is a real science," he said. "Being as how you're a pretty smart young fellow maybe you know about it."

"I know about it," I said. With a towel wrapped around it the police club would hurt just as much as if it were bare but it would leave a lot fewer marks in case the victim wanted to start something about police brutality.

The lieutenant came over to stand in front of me, swinging the club along his leg. "Now," he said, "suppose you just tell us how come you killed Fred and that other fellow."

"I didn't," I said.

It's a good thing I was watching him closely because he moved fast for such a fat man. He swung the club at the side of my head. I tried to roll with the blow but it didn't help much. The club connected and the sharp pain exploded inside of my head. It was another minute before my eyes would focus. When they did, I looked at him and told him what I thought of him.

"You know, Jed," the lieutenant said, "it's going to be kind of interesting to question him. He's got guts. We don't often get a guy like that in here."

As he finished speaking he swung again. This time the club caught me along the jaw hard enough to knock me off the chair. I thought I felt some teeth loosen as the pain shot through the whole side of my face. I got slowly to my feet, pulling myself up with the aid of the chair. As soon as my feet were solidly under me, I tried to swing the chair at him. But he was too quick for me. The club whistled through the air and struck the side of my head. The chair slipped from my nerveless fingers as I went down again.

This time it took me a little longer to get up. I didn't try to right the chair. I just stood there, staring at the lieutenant, waiting for my vision to clear up.

"Cute, too," the lieutenant said. "Did you see him, Jed? He was trying to hit me with that chair. . . . Better pick up the chair, son. You'll last longer if you're sitting down. But don't try any more tricks this time."

I bent down and picked up the chair carefully, but only because that was the only way I could pick it up.

And I was glad to sit down on it because my legs were feeling a little shaky. I looked up at him. I could feel the anger burning in me with almost as much intensity as the pain in my head.

"Now, you going to tell us about killing them two men?" the lieutenant asked.

I couldn't think of anything original so I repeated what I had called him before. His arm drew back, but before he could swing, the door opened and a man looked in. It was the policeman who had been on duty up front.

"How many times have I told you, Seth," the lieutenant said, "not to bother me when I'm questioning a prisoner?"

"See you a minute, Lieutenant?" the policeman asked.

The lieutenant waddled over to the door and the policeman whispered in his ear. When he was through the lieutenant looked annoyed, but he tossed the club on the floor and went out without saying anything.

I got out a cigarette and lit it with trembling hands. This beating was hurting a lot more than the one that Fred had given me. I smoked the cigarette and wondered if I could get enough strength back to tackle the other cop before the lieutenant returned. The pain in my head was making it hard to think and I still wasn't seeing too good.

Then it was too late, for the door had opened again and the lieutenant was back. But he didn't come all the way in, stopping in the doorway.

"Come on out here, son," he said.

At first I didn't realize he was talking to me. Then I got up and walked slowly toward the door, wondering what had happened. I had figured out that it had been Big Jim Anderson who phoned and stopped him that first time I'd been there. But it was most unlikely he'd be saving me again.

"Somebody wants to talk to you on the phone," the lieutenant said.

"The service seems to be improving," I muttered, but I was even more curious.

The lieutenant led the way into the front of the station and gestured to the phone on the desk. I picked it up and said hello.

"Pete, are you all right?" It was the voice of Lieutenant Weston. I'd never heard a more welcome sound in my life.

"Barely," I said. "And a few minutes more I wouldn't have been."

"Some man called me a few minutes ago from Rolin City. He wouldn't say who he was, but he said you'd just been picked up by the Rolin City police and he had an idea you were in for a rough time. Said he was calling us because he knew you were from Miami Beach and he didn't know anybody else to call. Then he hung up. Know who it might have been?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, you ought to buy him a nice Christmas present," Lieutenant Weston said. "I just read the riot act to that Hennessey there. I told him you were working for me and to either turn you loose this minute or charge you with something and let you have a lawyer."

"Thanks, Dick."

"Okay. He's going to turn you loose. Call me as soon as you get out."

"I'll call you the minute I'm away from here," I said. I hung up and turned to look at the lieutenant. His face wore the expression of a small boy who had just had his candy taken away from him.

"Police officers shouldn't ought to talk that way to other police officers," he grumbled. "Why didn't you tell me that you were working for the Miami Beach police?"

"It wasn't any of your business," I said.

"Well, you can go," he said heavily, "but that don't mean that you're in the clear yet. We might want to talk to you again and Lieutenant Weston said he'd produce you."

"My gun," I said.

"What?"

"My gun. Or do I have to swear out a warrant with the sheriff for larceny?"

"Oh, sure, your gun," he said.

"I'll see you, Lieutenant," I said. "Just remember that. I'll see you one of these days." I turned and walked out of the station. I couldn't exactly walk straight but I made it out to the car. I started the motor and gunned away from there.

My head felt as if it were twice as big as it should be and every inch of it was hurting with a blinding pain. I was still shaky and my vision was a little vague. I wanted to get out of Rolin City, but I wanted a drink first. And I wanted to do something else.

I stopped when I came to the bar and went in. There was one solitary drinker sitting in intoxicated melancholy at the near end of the bar. The bartender was perched on a stool back of the bar, reading a newspaper. He put the paper aside and came over to me. I ordered a double shot. I paid him and waited until he brought my change.

"Thanks," I said.

"I don't know what you mean, fellow," he said blankly.

"It's all right," I said. "I wouldn't think of telling anyone why I'm thanking you. And the lieutenant believes it was because I was to report back to Miami Beach by phone and they automatically started checking on me when I didn't."

"Maybe you know what you're talking about, but I don't."

"Sure. And let's keep it that way. But thanks just the same." I tossed off the drink and picked up some coins from the bar. "You can pour me another one of those." I went back to the phone booth. I put in a call to Lieutenant Weston. A couple of minutes later he was on the phone.

"I'm about ten blocks away from the station now," I said, "and it feels damn good."

"Then go ahead and get out of town as fast as you can," he said roughly. "Don't push your luck. How do you really feel?"

"Not too good," I admitted. "He was using a charming little device of a police club wrapped with a towel. You've heard of it?"

He cursed.

"But I feel a lot better than I would have if you'd called a half hour later. And as soon as I get a drink under my belt I'll be on my way."

"How'd you happen to get picked up there?" he asked.

"I came up to check something. Eddie Hanshew spotted me and I think he called the cops."

"I hope you'll have enough brains to stay out of that town until this is over," he said. "If it ever gets out that I claimed you were working for me, I'll be in trouble up to my neck."

"I know it and I appreciate it, Dick. Thanks."

I put the receiver back on the hook and returned to the bar. My drink was waiting for me. I beckoned the bartender over.

"Got any aspirin?" I asked.

He nodded and went over to the cash register. He came back with two aspirin which he put in front of me. "Headache?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "It's the Rolin City hospitality. I'm not used to it."

I washed the aspirin down with the drink, left money on the bar and got out of there. I got into my car and drove out of town without anything happening. No tails, nobody even looking for me. It was a relief even though I knew it wouldn't last long.

When I got home I was still feeling pretty bad. I took four more aspirin and a water glass full of whiskey. By the time the whiskey was gone I was hardly aware of my face. I tumbled into bed and went to sleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

I was awakened some time that evening by the phone. I stumbled into the living room and answered it. It was Joyce Masagna wanting to know where the hell I was. I told her that I didn't feel well and that bed was where the hell I was and that I'd see her the next day. I hung up and went back to bed.

I slept about fourteen hours that night and when I finally awakened it was still earlier than I'd been up since I was a child. But I felt considerably better. My face and head still hurt but it had settled down to a dull ache and this time aspirin seemed to help. I had three cups of coffee and then I made myself some breakfast and ate it slowly. Then I took my time showering and shaving and getting dressed. I still had a little time to kill, so I had a drink and thought about the case.

Finally I went out and drove down to the police station. This time there was only one tail on me, but I had an idea that was only because it was so early in the morning. It wasn't an hour when anyone would expect me to be out.

Even Lieutenant Weston looked amazed when I showed up in the doorway of his office.

"You must still be suffering from shock," he said. "The Pete Draco I know would never be up at this unseemly hour."

"Very funny," I said. "I slept fourteen hours and I've been waiting for hours for you to get to work. You've got regular banker's hours."

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Pretty good," I said, "only don't hit me in the face with any feathers. I'm in a delicate condition. You know something? I've been beaten by cops twice and by a gunman once in the past few days and I'm getting tired of it."

"Then you should have been a bookkeeper," he said. I wasn't going to get any sympathy from him.

"I meet more interesting figures in my present job," I said. "But did you find out anything about Gino's bank accounts?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "Gino wasn't exactly poor, but he wasn't as rich as you might expect him to be. He owns stock in a number of legitimate corporations and probably owns more in dummy names. I know that some of his stock was in his wife's name. He had a bank account in New York and there is less than two thousand dollars in it. He had a pretty good account in a Chicago bank but he withdrew two hundred and fifty thousand dollars just before he left on this last trip to Cuba, leaving a balance there of about five hundred dollars."

"Pretty," I said. "Any idea of why he drew out such a large sum of money?"

"No," he said, but it didn't sound to me as if he were being completely truthful with me.

I looked at him for a minute. "Dick," I said finally, "you told me that the Federal men have been showing a lot of interest in Gino because of the guns to Cuba. Maybe because I'm working on the case they've even been interested in me. The car that was following me this morning didn't belong to Eddie Hanshew. But were the Federal men interested in Gino for any other reason?"

He hesitated. "I'm not supposed to tell you or anyone else this," he said finally, "and I will personally frame you for murder if you ever let on that you know it, but they were. They've been working on two things separately. They've been about to crack down on him for taxes and they've been preparing a suit to take away his citizenship, on the basis that it was fraudulently acquired, and deport him."

"Looks like Gino picked a good time to die," I said.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Nothing," I said. "Just that he avoided a lot of trouble by dying when he did."

He kept looking at me in the same strange way. "Relax," I said. "That was Gino who died all right. Even I would swear to that. I didn't mean anything like that—but I did mean something else."

"What?"

"Find out something for me first," I said. "Do your Federal friends know about the two-engined Cessna plane out at the Miami airport?"

"Not that I know of. What about it?"

"It's there, that's all," I said. "It belongs to Honey Parker. Gino gave it to her a few days before he died. Actually, I don't think she knows any more than that, so don't go around putting her under bright lights."

"Are you telling me how to run my department?"

"No, I'm just telling you to be smart. Knowing about the plane doesn't give us the answer we want. Honey Parker obviously doesn't know the answer either or she wouldn't have wanted to hire me to find it for her. So don't scare her off. She's the best source we have for the actions of Gino Masagna."

"Damn it, Pete," he said. "Some day you're going to go too far."

"Sure," I said with a grin. "In the meantime, let's get back to that plane. Gino made the plans for renting hangar space at the airport for the plane and when it was delivered he ordered additional gas tanks placed on it. The pilot who'd been hired to fly it was Charles Hunter. The man who was killed up in Rolin City."

"How did you find this out?"

"By asking—at the airport."

He swore again.

"The one thing I didn't find out," I said, "because I didn't think at the time, was whether Hunter asked for a flight plan or not. If they were planning a long flight he might have. That's what I want you to do. Call the airport and find out."

He picked up the phone and put through the call. He identified himself and told them what he wanted. Then he waited, tapping the desk with his fingers.

"Yes?" he said finally. He listened some more. "All right. Thank you." He hung up and looked at me. "Hunter had asked for a flight plan to Honduras and for a report on weather conditions for a date two days after the death of Gino Masagna."

"But the request was made before Gino died?"

"Yes." He leaned forward across the desk. "Now, young man, you'd better do some talking. All that's been happening is that I've been getting information for you and telling you what we've been doing. Now, let's hear your story and it better be good."

"By the way," I said, "did you get the ballistics report from Rolin City and check it with your own report on the murder of Margot Shone?"

"Yeah. The same gun was used to kill all three of them." He suddenly realized that he'd answered still another question and he scowled. "Pete—" he began.

"I'm going to tell you," I interrupted, "only there isn't really very much to tell. There's a little bit of information and a lot of guessing. And none of it helps us very much at the moment."

"I'll be the judge of that," he said grimly. "Go on."

"Let's check everything we know as we go along and then I'll tell you what I think it adds up to. First, we now know that the government was about to slap a tax lien against Gino and that they were also going to try to deport him. It's reasonable to assume that Gino had some idea of what was going on. Right?"

"I expect so."

"Now we find Gino drawing all his money from the bank before he left on this last trip. He may also have had additional money in safe deposit boxes. He goes to Cuba and comes back here to spend a few days as he always does. He is presumably visited by someone who pays him several hundred thousand dollars—probably five hundred thousand.

"Now we have Gino walking around with somewhere between a half million and a million dollars in cash. A tidy sum, whatever it was. He was here three days before he died. Naturally, he spent considerable time with his girl friend and bought her some gifts. But among the gifts there was a two-engined Cessna which he then had fitted with extra tanks so that it could make a long flight without refueling—perhaps to Honduras. The first day he was here he phoned Charles Hunter, who we think may have worked for the Syndicate, and had him come to see him. Even if Hunter did work for them I doubt if contacting him was one of Gino's jobs. He was too important in the Syndicate for that. Then two days later, or maybe only one day later, Gino went to Rolin City and met Charles Hunter and Fred Kane there."

"How do you know?"

"I ran it down. They met in a bar where I was today. It was a place where Fred Kane hung out, but no one else from the police department ever went there, nor did any of Big Jim's outfit. And again I think we might assume that under normal circumstances Gino Masagna would not go off to a bar to meet with anyone like Fred Kane."

He nodded.

"I don't know what they talked about," I went on, "but the bartender saw Gino give each one of them a white envelope and the next day Fred Kane was trying to get a hundred-dollar bill changed. So I think we can safely assume that Gino was giving them money. I can't really claim to be familiar with Syndicate business, but my guess would be that if that was what it involved, the paymaster would have been someone of less importance than Gino."

"You're making sense so far," Weston said. "Go on."

"Something else about the Syndicate interests me," I said. "I don't have the feeling that they are inclined to be careless with such things as a half-million dollars. If Gino were accustomed to picking up that much money here and taking it to New York, or wherever, I imagine he would have some definite way of carrying it and that the method would also be known to other members of the Syndicate, just to anticipate any accidents. Yet it looks very much as if Big Jim Anderson is just as much in the dark as we are as to where the missing money is. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so anxious about what I'm doing. Sound okay?"

He nodded.

"Now, as some part of our overall puzzle, we've got three murders. Two of the victims, Charles Hunter and Fred Kane, we believe to have worked for the Syndicate, yet obviously they met Gino Masagna on some sort of personal business. Big Jim Anderson didn't even know that Gino had been in Rolin City. The third person to be murdered was Gino's mistress, who thought she was his wife because she had gone through a ceremony with him."

"How do you fit the murders in, Pete?"

"I think that Gino Masagna was planning a double-cross on his friends. I think, as I've said, that he had between a half million and a million dollars in cash and he was going to walk off with it. Probably to Honduras, where there's no extradition so he'd be safe from the Federal agents, too. And I think the only thing that stopped him from getting away with it was a heart attack."

"Lack of extradition wouldn't have protected him from the Syndicate," Lieutenant Weston said. "They would have tracked him down wherever he went. They would have had to."

"Sure," I said. "But Gino wasn't the first, nor the last, to think he could get away with it."

"What part do you think Hunter and Kane played in it?"

"I don't know where Kane figured in it, but he must have had a role. Hunter was to have flown Gino to wherever he was going. I don't suppose that he knew Gino was double-crossing the rest of the gang. Gino was probably too smart for that. But I think that somehow since Gino died, the Syndicate discovered what had been planned and the parts that Kane and Hunter played in it, and that's why they were killed."

"How do you figure in the attempt to put Kane's killing on you?"

"Suppose the killer was waiting outside the bar for Kane to leave—and for my money the killer was either Eddie Hanshew or Johnny Lane—and saw me have the fight with Kane. Since they own the police department it would be easy to slip a suggestion in the ear of Lieutenant Hennessey."

He nodded. "What about the murder of the blonde?"

"I'm only guessing," I said, "but I think that was a little different. She came down here, thinking she was Gino's wife and that she'd have a legal right to anything that was his. She knew he was carrying a lot of money and she wanted her hands on it. Then when I told her the other morning that she wasn't really married to Gino and that there was a legal Mrs. Masagna she had to face the fact that she'd made the trip for nothing. She was an angry woman when I left her in my apartment. Sometime after I left she made two phone calls to Big Jim Anderson in Rolin City. You can fill it in from there as well as I can. My guess is that she tried some kind of shakedown with Big Jim and he sent Eddie or Johnny to take care of her."

"It's a pretty good theory, Pete," he said. "You've uncovered some things and guessed at some others that may help us in clearing up the murders—but what about the main project? If your theory is right, where's the missing money?"

"I don't know," I said. "When I asked his wife if she knew about the nude pictures Gino carried around, she said that he spent most of his money on slow horses and naked women, so maybe he spent it."

"In three days?"

"It was a joke, son. I think maybe the problem is to find out what Gino did, if we can. We know that he saw Honey Parker some time or other every night. We know he made one trip to Rolin City and at least one trip to the Miami airport. And one trip to the television store. But what did he do the rest of the time?"

"I suppose you have some bright idea right where we can put our hands on his exact itinerary?" he asked sarcastically.

"If I did," I said with a grin, "I'd have already checked it. What I did pick up was done by following Gino. But right now I'm fresh out of clues."

"Maybe we ought to go over the plane."

"Sure, but I doubt if you'll find the money there. I don't think Gino would ever get very far away from that money."

"Well, he's far away from it now," he said. "What about his wife? Think she had any idea he was planning on skipping out?"

"No."

"Funny he didn't plan on taking one of the women with him. Gino wasn't one to get very far away from his women either."

"I can make a guess," I said. "I don't think he would have trusted anybody with the knowledge of what he intended doing. It would have been too risky. He probably figured that with that much money he could always pick up a few native girls wherever he was going. I don't suppose he would have changed his habits."

"Guess not. Well, I suppose we'll only get it the hard way, as usual."

I only half heard him for I suddenly remembered something that I'd said earlier without thinking it had any meaning. I was about to open my mouth, when I decided I'd keep it to myself until I had a chance to check on it myself.

"In the meantime," the lieutenant went on, "you might get to hell out of here so I can go to work."

"You ought to let me stay and watch," I said. "A man doesn't have the opportunity to see a miracle every day in the year."

"Get out," he roared.

"Sure," I said. "I'll see you around."

I turned and walked out. I got my car out of the police parking lot and started north. There was still one car following me. I said to hell with it and let it follow me. I drove on up to the Hapsburg Hotel and turned the car over to one of the boys. I went in to the bar and had a drink. My head and face still hurt, so after the drink I went up to the top floor of the hotel and went into the steam room. After that I had a good rubdown and it made me feel a little better. I went back down to the bar and started thinking, over another drink.

There was still one place that Gino had gone that I knew about and hadn't checked. It probably wouldn't turn up anything, but I decided maybe I'd better check it. I went out to the phone booths in the lobby and made a call to Honey Parker. She answered after the seventh ring, her voice heavy with sleep.

"Sorry to wake you up, baby," I said. "This is Pete Draco."

"Pete! Are you coming over to see me?"

"Not now. Maybe I'll drop in at the club tonight about the time of the last show."

"All right," she said. "But you should come over now. I hate to sleep alone."

"I'll bet," I said. "But I'm a working man and I want some information."

"Anything for you, darling."

"What's the name of the artist who painted that picture of you?"

"Mitchell. I do not remember his first name. He was a most unattractive man. He has a studio somewhere down on Fifth Street, I think. Why do you want him?"

"Just want to see if he made any copies of the picture," I said. "I might buy a few. I'll see you later." I hung up and went out to look in the phone directory. His name was Stanley Mitchell and he did have a studio on Fifth Street. I made a note of the address. Then I went over to the house phones and called Joyce's room. She also sounded sleepy when she answered.

"Pete," I said. "Did I wake you up?"

"I read almost all night," she said. "But it's all right. I should be getting up. What was wrong last night?"

"I'll tell you later. Meet me downstairs for lunch in about an hour."

"All right," she said.

I hung up and walked down the stairs to the lower level of the hotel. There was a door down there that led out onto the side street and I thought whoever had been following me would probably be watching the front. I was right. There was nothing in sight except a couple of parked taxis with their drivers talking to each other. I climbed into the first one and gave him the address on Fifth Street. As we went down Collins Avenue I kept watching through the rear window until I was sure there wasn't anyone following.

"Think someone was tailing you?" the cab driver asked.

"Yeah," I said. "A husband."

"They're the worst kind," he said chuckling. "Any time that happens you come in and get my cab and we'll lose him. Driving a hack down here gives a guy plenty of experience in that way."

"I'll keep you in mind," I said solemnly.

He tried to keep the conversation rolling but I didn't encourage him and he finally kept quiet for the rest of the trip. I paid him and walked over to the address. It appeared to be a place originally built for some sort of business, but what had been meant for a display window was now covered with attractive drapes. I found the button beside the door and pushed it.

After a few minutes the door opened. The man who stood there, blinking in the light, wore pajamas and robe and his hair was still mussed as though he'd just gotten up. He was tall and thin to the point of emaciation and I could see that Honey Parker would think he was unattractive.

"Sorry to have awakened you," I said.

"I was already awake," he said. "Just got up a few minutes ago."

"I'd like to talk to you a few minutes. May I come in?"

"I guess so," he said uncertainly. "The place is kind of a mess. I've been working pretty hard." He stood back and held the door for me.

I stepped inside. The place was one huge room with a couple of sections set off with screens. Almost everywhere I looked there were paintings or bare canvases and bottles of brushes. There was a small table with a couple of chairs and there was a cup of steaming coffee on it.

"Can I give you some coffee?" he asked.

"No, thanks," I said, "but go ahead and have yours while we talk." I followed him to the table and took the chair across from him. "My name is Pete Draco. I'm a private detective."

He looked up, an expression of alarm on his face. "What is this all about?" he demanded.

"Nothing to do with you," I said soothingly. "You painted a picture of Honey Parker, the stripper. A nude."

He nodded, watching me.

"I thought it was an excellent picture," I said. "Can you tell me who ordered it?"

"A Mr. Masagna."

"And he paid for it?"

"Yes."

"I presume she came here and posed for it?"

"Yes."

"When was it ordered?" I asked.

"About two months ago, I guess," he said. He was finally beginning to relax as he saw the questioning had little to do with him.

"And when was the final painting delivered?"

"It was last week," he said. "He came here for it. Wait a minute and I can tell you what day it was." He got up and crossed the room where he rummaged around in the top drawer of a dresser.

"It was Monday," he said.

That was the first day that Gino had been back in Miami Beach.

"Did you frame it for him or did he take it elsewhere to be framed?"

"I did it."

"Did you have any conversation with him while he was here?"

"No. He asked me if I'd finished it and I said I had. He looked at it and said he liked it. Then he paid me and left. That was all."

"He didn't say anything else?"

"No."

"Did you know who your Mr. Masagna was?"

He hesitated, then nodded. "I recognized his name and his face from stories I'd read about him. But it didn't make any difference to me. His money was just as good as anybody else's as far as I was concerned. I don't ask anybody how they earn their money."

"Very discreet of you, I'm sure," I said. "Well, thanks." I got up and moved toward the door.

"What's this all about?" he demanded.

"I really couldn't say," I said. "I never ask my clients any questions either." I kept on going and let myself out through the door. I walked down to the corner near the fishing pier and found a cab. I told him to take me back to the side entrance to the hotel.

I checked Joyce's room number. She was just ready to come down. I told her I'd meet her on the patio.

I went out and got a table and ordered two drinks. They arrived at the same time she did. She looked lovely.

"I'm still wounded," she said, "over being stood up last night."

"Sorry," I said, "but I was up in Rolin City playing patty-cake with the local cops and I bruise easily. All I could think about was getting home and falling into bed."

"You mean you were beaten up again?" she exclaimed.

"I'm beginning to feel that everybody thinks that it's all right to take a few punches at Draco. I guess I have to face it; there are some people who don't find me charming."

"Poor darling," she said, reaching out to touch my face.

"There, it's better already," I told her. "Maybe it was even worth it. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"What I've been doing every day," she said. "Curl up with a good book. It may improve my mind, but it doesn't do much for the rest of me. Why?"

"The Draco Morale-Building Service is going to take over just as soon as we have lunch."

"What are we going to do?"

"You'll have to wait and see. No more talking about it. Did you really miss me last night?"

"Dreadfully."

"Just because you thought that I might be goofing off instead of working on your case?"

"You're horrid," she said. "It had nothing to do with the case. Just because I want the money that Gino had doesn't mean that I think about it all the time."

"I know, honey," I said. "You think about my getting the money for you. But if you do get the money, you'll probably have to give some of it up."

"What do you mean?"

"The government has a claim against Gino for some taxes. But there is one consolation. If we find the money I think there will be more than five hundred thousand there."

"Why?"

"Just before he left on this last trip, Gino took a little more than two hundred thousand dollars out of a bank in Chicago. Since he was a cautious soul, he may also have had some tidy little bundles of cash stashed elsewhere. If so that will be along with it, too."

"Why did he do that?" she asked.

"The usual reason. Gino was planning on an old game known as the double-cross. In other words he was grabbing his own money as well as the half a million belonging to his partners and buying himself one run-out powder."

She stared at me for a minute. "The son of a bitch," she said. "You mean he was going to run out on me too and leave me with no money?"

"Something like that. He was going to travel light—just him and about a million dollars in cash. It's a nice way to travel. You didn't have any idea he was going to do that?"

"If I had," she said tightly, "you can bet I would have stopped him. The dirty bastard."

"Gino's last plan seemed to stir up the same feelings in the breasts of everyone who knew him," I said. "In the meantime, let's have some lunch."

We ordered lunch and ate it in silence. Joyce's face was still tight with anger when we finished our coffee. I paid the check and we went in through the lobby. I steered her for the front door.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"For a ride," I said. "Have you ever been in Miami Beach before?"

"No," she said. "This is my first trip."

"Okay, just lean back and relax. We're going to take an afternoon off and behave like tourists." I sent one of the boys after my car. "And don't pay any attention if there seem to be a few people following us."

"Who?" she asked.

"I don't know. I think this time it's only some Federal cops, but quite a number of people have been wanting to follow me ever since I took this job."

"Can't you lose them?"

"Sure, when it's important, but we'll let them tag along this afternoon. It might be educational for them."

The car rolled up in front and the boy got out. I tipped him and we climbed in. Driving carefully so that the tail wouldn't have any trouble following, I headed south. We cut across Dade Boulevard to the Venetian Causeway. When we reached Miami I turned left on Biscayne Boulevard and headed toward Homestead.

When we got near Kendall, we stopped off at the Rare Bird Farm. We spent an hour wandering around through it, then drove on down to the Parrot Jungle. We spent another hour among the birds and the botanical gardens and once again headed south. I noticed the car was still following us. I grinned to myself, wondering if they were enjoying themselves.

The next stop was the Monkey Jungle near Goulds. It's an interesting place to visit, since the wild monkeys run free and the visitors watch from caged paths. I've often thought that's the way all zoos ought to be; cage the visitors and let the animals have all the freedom they want.

Joyce was acting like a kid, having the time of her life, and I was glad I'd decided to do it. I watched her and tried to imagine what she would have been like if she had never met Gino Masagna, if that other part of her just didn't exist.

Then we went on down to the Orchid Jungle near Homestead and wandered through every variety of orchid, most of them in bloom. By the time we'd finished there, the afternoon was well shot so we started back for the Beach. The car was still patiently following.

It was almost dinner time when we reached the hotel in Miami Beach. I had them park the car and we went into the lobby.

"Run upstairs and change for dinner and meet me in the bar," I told her.

"All right," she said. "Pete, it was a wonderful afternoon. It's been so many years since I did anything like that. Thank you so much."

"It's just one of our minor services," I said. "Run along."

I watched her walk into the elevator, then I went on to the main bar. Buck came over with a bottle as soon as I climbed on a stool.

"Been working hard?" he asked.

"Sure. I spent the afternoon looking at monkeys and birds and flowers."

He poured me a double shot. "You need this," he said. "You've flipped your lid."

I laughed. "Just showing the lady the natural wonders of the great state of Florida. The Chamber of Commerce doesn't appreciate all I do for them."

"That reminds me," he said. "Did I ever tell you—"

"I'm sure you did," I interrupted. "Buck, I want to talk to you before the lady comes down to join me."

"Okay," he said. "Joe said you were asking what time I was coming on tonight. What's up?"

"Nothing very important. Remember you told me that

Gino Masagna showed you the painting of the redhead? The nude."

"Yeah," he said. He shook his head. "That's really some doll."

"Can you remember what day he showed it to you?"

"Well, I'm not sure," he said, his face working with thought. "Let me see, he came in—"

"Was it the first day he'd checked into the hotel or later?"

His face cleared. "Oh, yeah. It was the second day he was here. I remember now. He was showing me the pictures in his pocket the first day he was here. Then it was the second day that he came in with the painting. It was in the evening. He said he was on his way to take it over and show it to her."

"Did he say anything else about it, Buck?"

"I think he said something about it would be great hanging in his study and I guess we kicked it back and forth with a few jokes, something like that."

"Anything else?"

"Can't think of anything. He wasn't much of a talker."

I looked around and saw Joyce on her way to the bar. She climbed on the stool next to me and said hello to Buck. He gave her a big grin and fixed her a drink.

Then we went into the dining room and had dinner. We sat through the floor show. After that we went back to the bar and took one of the tables. We had a few drinks and danced until the orchestra finally folded up and left.

"Well, it's been a nice evening," I said. "Now it's time that I go off to work."

"It's been a wonderful afternoon and evening," she said. "But you always have to go off just when it reaches the time of night when it might get even more interesting."

"That's the trouble with being a working man," I said lightly.

"Where can you go to work at this time of night?" she asked.

"Secrets of the trade," I said solemnly.

"I'll bet it's another woman," she said.

"It's my fatal attraction," I said. "They won't leave me alone."

"You're a bastard, too," she said, but she was only half serious.

I grinned at her and walked her to the elevator. I said good night firmly and left. I waited out front until my car was brought up and then I drove away. Watching the rear view mirror I saw that once more there were two cars following me. The others had finally caught up.

I decided I'd had enough of it and I still had a little spare time. I drove across the Venetian Causeway to Miami and then went to work to lose them. It took about thirty blocks of driving, but I finally ditched them and headed back for the Causeway.

I parked near the Feathered Doll and went in. I was just about in time for the last show. Honey Parker spotted me the minute she came on and this time she made her number sizzle. When she took her last bow, she looked at me and motioned with her head for me to come back. I made my way through the crowd and strolled toward the rear.

She called for me to come in when I knocked on her dressing room door. I opened the door and stepped inside. She was standing in the center of the room not wearing a damn thing except a G-string.

"Hello, baby," she said. She came over and kissed me lightly. "I'll be ready in a minute."

She started to get dressed and I sat there, thinking that people who were built the way she was shouldn't be so damn casual about what they wore—or didn't wear.

She was soon clothed and we left. We went out to the car and drove directly to her apartment on one of the Venetian Islands.

"I'm going to get into something more comfortable," she said when we entered her apartment.

"All you do is get in and out of clothes," I said. "How do you have time for anything else?"

She laughed and disappeared toward the rear of the apartment. I sat on the couch. That damned painting was right across from me. It seemed almost impossible to get away from the bare flesh of Honey Parker.

"Did you get a copy of the picture, baby?" she called from the other room.

"No," I said. "The painter was very short-sighted. He didn't think to make any copies."

She laughed. "I wouldn't worry about it, if I were you. Why think about a copy when you can have the original?" She came into the room and posed beside the painting. She wasn't wearing anything except a pair of gold slippers.

"Those are very pretty slippers," I said lamely.

She laughed again. "Don't be stuffy. I like to go without clothes. It makes me feel free and wonderful." She came over and sat down. "It is nice to have the painting. Now, when I'm old and fat, people will have to believe me when I tell them what I once looked like."

"How did Gino happen to give it to you?" I asked. "I would have thought he would want to keep it."

"Maybe his wife wouldn't have liked it. She is probably fat and dumpy, no?"

I had a vision of Joyce, who could have held her own with Honey, with or without clothes. "I don't think so," I said drily.

"Anyway, I will tell you a little secret," she said. "Gino was only going to let me keep the painting until he went back to New York. But he is dead, so I will keep it. It is my inheritance. I do not think his wife would want it anyway."

"Probably not," I said. Even though I was trying not to pay any attention, I didn't think I was ever going to get used to trying to carry on a normal conversation under those circumstances. "Don't you think you ought to slip on a robe? You may get cold."

"It bothers you?" she asked. She laughed with delight. "That is good. Guess what happened to me today, Pete?" I'll bet you can't."

"You had a nightmare in which you found yourself out on a busy street with all your clothes on," I said.

She grinned. "The police came to see me again. That very nice Lieutenant Weston. He's sweet."

"I guess you could call him that. Did you receive him like this?"

"Oh, no. It was like an official visit. But he is cute. He wanted to ask some more questions about Gino. And you know what he said?"

"No," I lied. "What did he say? That you were cute, too?"

She giggled. "No, silly. He said that they believed that Gino had been intending to run away and never come back. With the plane that he said he bought me. Without taking me with him. Do you think that's true, Pete?"

"I think he may have been planning something like that."

"Well, I don't care," she said with a toss of her head. "The plane is mine and they can't take it away from me. But I guess I don't need to hire you now."

"That's nice," I said. "Why are you still working on me then?"

"I've got other plans for you," she said, with a suggestive smile. "Anyway, you know who else came to see me?" she asked.

"No. Who?"

"Some creep named Eddie Hanshew. He said he used to work for Gino."

"When was this?"

"Today. Right after the police were here. He tried to say that I knew where Gino hid something—" she glanced at me to see if I'd react to that—"and that I'd better tell him where it was."

"What did you do?"

"Told him to get the hell out."

"Did he?" I asked.

"He did. But you know what else he did?"

"What?"

"He said he'd already taken care of one of Gino's women and he could take care of another one and I'd better remember it. What did he mean, Pete?"

"You remember reading about a blonde who was murdered a couple of nights ago?"

"I read something about it," she said, "but I didn't pay any attention. Who was she?"

"Well, she was one of Gino's women. From New York. She came down here after Gino died and she wanted to hire a private detective, too. Probably the same reason that you did. She was murdered. In my apartment."

"By him?"

"Nobody's proved it, but he's my candidate."

"What was she doing in your apartment? Was she the one you were working for?"

"No," I said. "She came to me later because she was frightened. Eddie Hanshew had called on her, too."

"Well, he doesn't scare me," she said defiantly. "I'm not afraid of any bum like him. If Gino was alive, he'd take care of him."

"But Gino isn't alive," I said gently.

"True," she said. She was quiet a moment and then moved closer to me. Somehow, it didn't seem as bad as it had earlier. "Kiss me, Pete."

So I kissed her. That wasn't so bad either.

"Honey is sleepy," she said. "Carry me into bed."

There's one thing you can say about Draco; he's always polite. So I picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. If I had any idea that all I was going to do was put her on the bed and then tippy-toe out, I was sadly mistaken. Honey Parker was a strong-minded woman and she had a quite different idea. . . .

Later, when she was quite soundly asleep I left the bedroom and went back to the living room. First, I had a drink just to steady my nerves. God, I thought, the things I do to earn a living. I grinned at my reflection in a mirror on the wall. Then I went over and took down the painting of Honey Parker. I carried it over to the couch and put it face down.

I carefully pried one corner of the back of the frame loose and lifted it so I could look in between the back and the canvas. I hadn't given myself much space, so I lit a match and held it to the opening. The sight was a beautiful one to behold; layer after layer of lovely green currency.

CHAPTER TEN

TIME PASSED and I was unaware of it until the match burned my fingers. I threw it into the ashtray. I could no longer see the money but I continued to stare at it as if I could. And in a way I could. There's something about that much money—just its existence—that is numbing. I could begin to understand why men are tempted to steal.

I took a deep breath and pressed the corner of the back into place. I shrugged into my coat and picked up the painting. Honey Parker was still snoring gently in the other room as I let myself out of the apartment.

I drove straight back to my place and carried the painting up to the apartment. After looking around, I finally set it on the floor back of the couch and pushed the couch back into place. It was probably just as good a place as anywhere else.

I went into the kitchen and made myself some coffee. I sat sipping it, thinking about the case. In one way, the case was over. I'd done what I'd been hired to do. But my face still hurt enough to make me think that I wasn't quite finished yet.

After I finished the coffee, I went into the living room and picked out six old books. Back in the kitchen, I found some wrapping paper and carefully bundled up the books and tied them. I went back downstairs and climbed in the car. I headed up Collins Avenue. It was late, so I pushed the Cadillac along at a fast clip.

When I finally reached Hollywood, I turned left on Hollywood Boulevard. Once I was past the city hall and there was only open country around me, I let the speedometer needle creep up to eighty and held it there. About three miles farther on I came to where the old canal came down to the road. I pulled off the road and got out.

The spot was as deserted and quiet as if I'd traveled for days to get away from civilization. The sky was already beginning to lighten as morning drew nearer.

Using the lights from the car, I slid down the bank of the canal and hid the package of books beneath a clump of grass. I scrambled back up to the road, got into the car and turned it around. I headed back, pushing heavily on the accelerator.

It was daylight when I got back to my place in Miami Beach. I went upstairs, stripped off my clothes and went to bed. It had been a long day and I was asleep as soon as I hit the bed. I didn't even dream about naked women and money.

About four hours later, I awakened as I'd planned to do. I was still tired, but after a shower and two cups of coffee I began to feel better. I got dressed and went downstairs. Under the pretense of going next door to see my landlord I took a look around. There were two cars parked up the street and I was pretty sure they were the two that had been following me whenever they could. One of them was a big black Cadillac and I thought that one probably belonged to Big Jim Anderson.

Back upstairs, I picked up the phone and dialed the number of the police. When they answered, I ask for Lieutenant Weston.

"Pete Draco," I said when he came on. "There have been two cars trying to follow me the past few days. One of them must be cops. Are they yours or the Federal men?"

He hesitated a minute. "They're Federal men, Pete," he said finally. He chuckled. "They're pretty sore about how many times you've thrown them off the trail. They're beginning to think that you're deeper in this thing than you admit."

"I just don't like to have strangers peering over my shoulder," I said. "Do me a favor, Dick?"

"If I can . . ."

"Get them to leave me alone for a couple of hours."

"I don't know about that. . . ."

"Look, I can lose them any time I want to. All I'm asking for is a couple of hours. If they'll do that I think I can give all of you a lot of answers. I want them off my tail."

"Why?"

"That's my business. Look, Dick, I've always played square with you and I'm still going to. But I have to be able to play this my way and that's it. They'll hamper my style if they're around."

"All right, Pete, I'll see what I can do. But you'd better not let me down."

"I won't," I said and hung up.

I went down to the office and got out the oil and rag. I worked carefully, cleaning every part of the .38. When I'd finished, I loaded it and then I oiled the holster. I put it on and slipped the gun into it. After that, I opened a drawer in the desk and took out a .32 with a one-inch barrel. I cleaned it and loaded it. I got out a roll of adhesive tape and used two strips to tape the gun to the calf of my right leg. I got up and walked around the office to see if it was all right. It was.

Finally, I was ready. I took another trip next door to check on the cars. Only one of them, the Cadillac, was still there. I went back to the office and got a large piece of fairly stiff paper from the filing cabinet. Using a road map, I made my own crude map and folded it so it would fit into my pocket. I went out and got into my car and headed north. When I got above Fortieth Street, I did some dodging around to lose anyone tailing me—only I was careful not to be too good. I wanted to keep that black Cadillac with me. Then I headed on up Route A1A as though I thought I was all alone in the world.

I drove straight through Hollywood and on up to Rolin City. I reached the street where the police station was and parked about a block above it. Looking in the rear view mirror I saw the black Cadillac ease to the curb two blocks away. I grinned to myself. They were probably puzzled about what I was doing there.

I checked the street before I got out. Just below the police station and across the street from it, there was a small bar and grill called Harry's. Across from where I was parked there was a candy store. I got out and went over to it. I entered a phone booth, dialed the operator and told her I wanted the Rolin City police. She put me through and I asked for Lieutenant Hennessey. He came on a couple of minutes later.

"Lieutenant Hennessey?" I asked.

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Never mind," I said. "Just say I'm a friend. How would you like to get that smart Miami Beach private detective with his pants down and so there wouldn't be any kickback?"

"You mean Draco?" he asked.

"That's the sonuvabitch," I said. "How would you like to get him?"

"Well—I'd have to know who you are and what you're talking about." He was trying to play it careful.

"Nix on who I am," I said, "but if you want to meet me right now, I'll give you the whole story. But you'll have to be by yourself. I don't trust nobody but you."

"Where?" he asked. He didn't like the sound of that at all.

"I'm across the street in Harry's bar," I said. "But you got to come alone. I see anybody with you and I'm cutting out the back and away before you get here."

He was silent for a minute and I could almost hear the wheels clicking in his head. He had suspected a trap at first, but now he was thinking that nothing could happen while he was right across the street. Besides he probably knew Harry very well.

"You're sure you got something?" he asked.

"Yeah, but you're wasting time, Lieutenant."

"I'll be right over," he said and hung up.

I went back across the street, started the motor of my car and waited. In just a couple of minutes, the lieutenant came out of the police station, settling his hat on his head. He waddled down to the corner, looked both ways and started to cross the street.

I started the Cadillac forward slowly and smoothly, but when he almost reached the center of the street, I pushed the accelerator to the floor board and it leaped forward with a surge that crushed me against the back of the seat.

He heard the whine of the motor and looked up. His fat face fell apart and then he tried to get out of the way. But it was several minutes and at least one hundred pounds too late.

I swung the wheel at the last minute so I wouldn't hit him straight on. My left front fender caught him across his scurrying fat rump. There was a good solid thump as it hit. He screamed thinly and then I was past him. Glancing in the rear view mirror, I could see him rolling in the street. Farther back the black Cadillac was speeding in pursuit of me. It showed no signs of slowing down for the lieutenant.

I drove straight on through Rolin City, heading south again. When I reached Hollywood, I swung right, driving west along the same route I had taken the night before. The black Cadillac was still following.

When I reached the canal I pulled off in the same spot and stopped. The car behind drifted on by, but I could hear it starting to slow down once it was past. The spot where I parked was masked from ahead by a fringe of small trees along the side of the road and in the same way it masked the black Cadillac as soon as it had gone a few yards.

There was another car coming from the direction of Hollywood, so I waited until it had gone by. I wanted to give the boys in the black Cadillac plenty of time anyway. Then I got out of the car and took the map I'd made from my pocket. I opened it and pretended to be going over it carefully, looking up at the canal a couple of times.

Finally, when I thought they'd had plenty of time, I folded up the paper and put it back in my pocket. I walked over to the edge of the canal, surveyed the road carefully, and slid down the bank out of sight. The package of books were exactly where I'd left it. I picked it up and slowly climbed back of the bank. I wasn't quite sure how the rest of it was going to go, but I thought I was ready for it.

"Hello, sucker," the voice said as I climbed up on the level ground again.

I looked up. Eddie Hanshew and Johnny Lane both stood there, with guns in their hands. But they were turned so that anyone driving by wouldn't see the guns. I tried to look surprised.

"What—what are you doing here?" I asked.

"Just keeping an eye on you," Eddie said. "We wouldn't want you to get hurt, would we, Johnny? Now, you just take it easy, sucker." He came forward, being careful not to get between me and Johnny Lane. When he reached me, he reached forward and flicked my coat back. He took the gun from my holster.

"The sucker must think he's a big boy now," he said. "He's carrying a gun. What have you got in the package, sucker?"

"Some books," I said.

"I'll bet," he said. "I wouldn't mind some reading like that. How about you, Johnny?"

"Yeah," Johnny said. "Let's take it away from him and open it up and see."

I held my breath because I didn't want the showdown to come that way.

"Better not," Eddie said. "Big Jim might not like it. He might think our fingers got sticky. We'd better take both packages in just the way they are."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded. "I've had enough of you guys pushing me around."

"Yeah?" Eddie said. He held his gun loosely pointed at me. "You want to make something of it right here?"

"No," I said.

"Okay, then, sucker. We're going to take you in to see the boss. He'll be glad to see your little package but maybe he won't be so happy to see you. He ain't going to like what you did to Lieutenant Hennessey."

I tried to look surprised again. "You were following me?"

"That's right, sucker. Now get into your car. I'm going to ride back with you and Johnny will follow along behind us."

I walked ahead of them and got into the car. Eddie slipped in beside me. "Just put the package in between us on the seat, so we both know where it is," he said. "Okay, let's go."

I turned the car around and started back toward Hollywood. Johnny Lane soon caught up with me and stayed close behind.

We drove through Hollywood and turned north toward Rolin City. When we got there, Eddie again directed me until we ended up at the huge house occupied by Big Jim Anderson. I turned into the driveway and drove around to the rear of the house. The black Cadillac slid in alongside my car.

"Pick up your package and come along, sucker," Eddie said. "Make it easy on yourself and don't try to make any break for it. Johnny, go get Big Jim."

Johnny Lane went off toward the house. I headed for the small house in the back, with Eddie close behind me. Again he reached around me and opened the door. I stepped inside and he flicked the lights on.

"Go sit down," he said, giving me a shove in the back. I crossed the room and sat in a big leather chair. I held the package of books with my left hand and let my right hand drop down beside my leg. I began to slowly loosen the adhesive tape. There wasn't going to be too much time. I could feel the muscles of my stomach tightening up.

"Relax, sucker," Eddie said. He slipped his gun back into his shoulder holster and got out a cigarette. "You ain't going any place. You had your chance to be a big man back there on the road before I took your gun away from you."

The door opened and Big Jim came in, followed by Johnny Lane.

"What's all this?" Big Jim demanded. He sounded as if he were in a bad mood.

"We stayed with him today," Eddie said. "That carload of cops wasn't around. The sucker thought he'd shook us off and we followed him out along Hollywood Boulevard until we came to the canal. He stopped there and we coasted on by and then came back on foot. He had some kind of a paper in his hand. Looked like a map or something. Then he jumped down in the canal and came up with that package he's holding. So we brought him in with his package."

"What is it?" Big Jim asked.

"There's only one thing it could be," Eddie said. "But that ain't all. The sucker ran down Hennessey."

"I know about Hennessey," Big Jim said. He went over and sat down at the desk. "He's alive. But he's got a broken hip and some broken ribs and the doctor says he's suffering from shock. He hasn't done any talking, but he'll be all right, I guess."

"That's too bad," I said.

"The sucker was packing a gun when we picked him up," Eddie said. "He's trying to be a big boy suddenly. I guess he don't learn so easy like."

Big Jim looked at me again as if I were some kind of specimen he was looking at through a microscope. "Did you check the package, Eddie?" he asked.

"No. We didn't even touch it. We figured it would be better if it got opened after we got here."

Big Jim permitted himself something close to a smile. "And smarter," he said quietly. "Okay, take the package away from him and let's see if it's all there."

Eddie came across the room and took the package away from me. He went back and put it on the desk. Then he untied it and began taking off the paper. The three men were all tense as the folds of paper fell away. Eddie yanked away the last sheet and there were the six books I had wrapped. There was a moment of deathly silence.

"What the hell?" Eddie said savagely.

"I told you they were books," I offered.

Eddie and Johnny both turned toward me. "Still a wise guy," Eddie said. "Well, this time I'll fix you, sucker." He started to come across the room.

"Eddie," Big Jim said. He didn't say it loudly, but it was enough to stop Eddie. "Hold it." Big Jim's gaze switched to me. "What's your game, Draco?"

"No game," I said. "I had six books hidden out there at the canal. I went out to get them and that was all. I didn't notice that they were behind me. When they did come up to me I tried to tell them that the package contained books but they wouldn't pay any attention to me. I'm sorry."

"He's trying to pull something," Eddie said.

"Shut up," Big Jim said. "For once in your life, Eddie, you're probably right, but I'll ask the questions. What are you trying to pull, Draco?"

"Nothing," I said as innocently as I could.

Big Jim's head swiveled until he was looking at Eddie. "Are you sure nobody followed you here?"

"Positive. Ask Johnny. He was right behind us and he would have spotted anybody who was following."

Big Jim looked at Johnny.

"Nobody followed us," Johnny said. "But I think Eddie's right, boss. The guy's too cocky, running down Hennessey that way, pulling that book trick on us, then just sitting there the way he is."

"I don't pay either one of you to think," Big Jim said. He stared at me thoughtfully. "He wouldn't pull a trick like that with the books unless he already knew where the money was. Is that it, Draco?"

I just shrugged, staring back at him.

"I'll get it out of him," Eddie said eagerly.

"When I want you to do something I'll tell you," Big Jim said. "He knows where the money is and he wants some kind of trade. What is it, Draco?"

"Why would he do a dumb thing like that?" Eddie asked. "If he knew where the money is why would he walk into our hands?"

"I just told you," Big Jim said. "What is it you want, Draco?"

"Not much," I said. "Three people have been murdered. The idea has been noised around that I killed two of them. Since all three were killed with the same gun that's like trying to push all three of them over to me. I don't like it. So I'll make a deal with you. You tell me who did the killings and I'll tell you where the money is."

"That's all?" Big Jim asked. "The name of the killer for where the money is?"

"That's it," I said.

"Boss," Eddie began.

"Shut up," Big Jim said. "I'll trade with you, Draco.

Eddie killed all three of them. On my orders. Hunter and Kane because they were in on the double-cross Gino was planning. And the blonde bitch because she was trying a shakedown."

"What the hell's the matter with you, boss?" Eddie said.

"You're being stupid, Eddie," I told him. "All that was agreed was that he'd tell me who did the killings and then I'd tell him where the money is. The idea is that after I tell him, he sends one of you to check on it and if you get it, then he merely tells you to make a fourth killing. It's really very simple."

"Yeah," Eddie said with a grin. "Sorry, boss. It'll be a pleasure to bump this guy off."

"With the same gun, Eddie?" I asked.

"Yeah, with the same gun," he said, unconsciously touching the bugle beneath his left arm.

"Eddie, you're a fool," Big Jim said.

"It's all right," I said. "I'll keep my share of the bargain as well as you did. I've got the money."

The three of them stared at me.

"Where?" Big Jim asked tightly.

"Uh-uh," I said. "You see, we're pretty much where we were before except that I know what I only suspected before—that Eddie did the killings. And his gun will convict him when I take him in for it."

"What the hell—" began Eddie.

"Now he's bluffing," Big Jim said. "All right, Eddie. Go make him talk, only be sure you don't kill him until he tells us where he has the money."

"It's a pleasure, boss," Eddie said. He pulled the gun from his holster and started toward me. "Okay, sucker, I'm going to give you the fanciest pistol whipping you ever had. Any time you're ready to talk, you just let me know."

He came in on his toes, walking like a cat, hefting the gun in his hand. I was still sitting crouched forward in the chair. He stopped in front of me, the grin fixed on his face. He balanced there on his toes for a minute, then suddenly swung the gun at my head.

I was ready for it. I fell back into the chair, ducking the blow. At the same time I kicked up with my left foot, the toe of my shoe catching him in the crotch. He screamed and doubled over, the gun flying from his hand.

At the same moment, I grabbed the gun under my pants leg and ripped the gun out, tearing the adhesive free with it. I pushed myself up out of the chair and dived for the floor, rolling as I hit. I came to a stop on my belly, facing the room.

Johnny Lane was fast. He already had his gun out and was bringing it to bear on me. There wasn't any time to be fancy. I centered my gun and pulled the trigger. I saw his shirt jump just above the belt buckle and knew it was a hit. His gun went off, but the bullet hit the floor. He looked surprised. Then he coughed and started sliding to the floor. I didn't watch to see him make it. I turned and looked at Big Jim. I should have looked quicker.

Big Jim had pulled a gun from the desk drawer and had it leveled. I tried to snap a shot at him but knew I'd missed even as I squeezed the trigger. His gun went off right on top of mine and something hit me in the left shoulder so hard it half spun me around. It hurt for a minute and then went numb. I rolled again and as I came back to my belly, I had my gun ready and pulled the trigger. Big Jim jerked backward against the desk. He dropped his gun and reached for his chest. The blood spurted between his fingers as he crashed over and down.

I looked around for Eddie. He had crawled across the floor and picked up his gun. Now he was sitting up, trying hard to steady the gun, his face still contorted with pain.

Things were going too fast. And I wanted to be sure that I took Eddie alive. I tried to forget about the gun in his hand and steadied my own gun. I heard his go off and something slammed into my left shoulder again. It threw my aim off, but I quickly got it back and squeezed the trigger gently. Eddie's left leg flopped. He screamed again and the gun fell from his hand. It should have. I'd hit him in the left kneecap.

But Eddie had guts. He tried to grab his shattered knee with one hand and pick up the gun with the other.

I put another bullet through the other knee cap. His body jerked across the floor and he screamed for the third time. This time he stayed there, sobbing, without reaching for the gun.

I stayed where I was staring stupidly across the room for several seconds before I realized that it was over. Finally I stared down at my left shoulder and was vaguely surprised to see that my coat and shirt were covered with blood. I sat up and slipped the gun into my pocket. I got out my handkerchief and wadded it up. I slipped it inside my shirt and pressed it against the spot where I seemed to be bleeding. I got slowly to my feet. I felt a little dizzy, but otherwise pretty good. I walked over and looked at Johnny Lane and Big Jim. They both looked as if they were dead. I turned and went back to Eddie.

He was lying on the floor whimpering with pain in his legs.

"For God's sake get me a doctor," he said. "I'll bleed to death."

"Not you," I said. "You may lose a little blood but you won't bleed to death. And maybe you'll never walk again, but they can carry you to your execution." I picked up his gun and slipped it in my pocket. I bent over him and found my other gun in his pocket. I took it out and slipped it into mine. Then I tried to pick Eddie up, but it couldn't be done. My left arm was refusing to work properly.

Finally, I solved it. I reached down and grabbed Eddie with my right hand and started to drag him across the floor. His whimpering suddenly stopped as he passed out.

I got the door open and dragged him outside and across the gravel until I reached my car. I opened the door and propped him up against the end of the seat. I went around to the other side, climbed in and bent to grab him again. It was a little harder to drag him into the car, but I finally did it.

All I wanted to do then was to rest, but there wasn't any time. Both of us were losing a lot of blood.

It's about twenty-five miles from Rolin City to Miami Beach. I made it in twenty-two minutes. A couple of times it was close and there were at least two cars that had less paint after I passed them than they'd had before. I hit upper Collins Avenue still doing seventy-five, but I hadn't gone more than three blocks when a motorcycle cop showed up with siren screaming.

I slowed down, but didn't stop as he came alongside. "Get me to Lieutenant Weston," I shouted. I nodded my head toward my left shoulder. He took a quick glance at my shoulder, then his gaze slid past me to the limp body of Eddie beside me.

"You're Draco?" he shouted back at me.

"Yes."

"Thought so. We were asked to look for your car about a half hour ago. Come on."

He shot ahead of me and opened his siren. Within ten blocks we were doing eighty down Collins and tourists were scattering all over the place.

We screamed into the parking lot at police headquarters and screeched to a stop. I could see policemen running from the back of the building. I turned off the motor and sagged back against the seat.

The motorcycle cop came running back and opened the door on my side.

"Get Weston down here," I said. "I'll never make it up to his office."

He turned and shouted, "Get Weston down here," at someone. Then he turned back to me and started cutting my coat away from my shoulder.

"Save your breath until Weston gets here," he said. "Who's that guy?"

"Eddie Hanshew."

"He can wait then," he said and went on with what he was doing. I was aware that there were other cops crowding around the car, but I think I slipped away a little, for the next thing I knew Lieutenant Weston had replaced the motorcycle cop.

"Hi, Dick," I said. "Busy day."

"Keep quiet," he said. "We're getting you to the hospital. You can tell me later."

"No," I said. "Go to my apartment. Get painting of nude girl—Honey Parker—from back of couch. Pry off back. This is Eddie Hanshew. He killed Hunter, Kane and blonde. His gun in my pocket. Shot him through both knee caps. Johnny Lane and Big Jim up in house back of regular house. Dead, I think. Maybe—"

I slid into somebody's dark pocket and got smaller and smaller. . . .

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOMEBODY WAS whispering some place but I couldn't tell where, or what they were saying. Slowly I became aware that everything was white and for a long time it had been black. My body felt as if it were floating.

I gradually came back to reality and realized that I was in a bed in a hospital. My left shoulder was all bandaged up and something was stuck in my arm. My gaze followed a tube up to a bottle filled with dark red liquid. And suddenly I remembered what it was all about. I tried to sit up, but I couldn't quite make it.

A nurse came over and smiled down at me. She was pretty and so I tried to smile back.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Just great," I said. "How long have I been here?"

"You were brought in yesterday," she said. "You've got a visitor if you feel up to it. The doctor says you can talk for a few minutes but don't overdo it."

"I never overdo it, honey," I said. "And I feel up to almost anything."

She went away and then a minute later Lieutenant Weston was there.

"How do you feel, Pete?" he asked.

"Fine," I said. "I was just about to leave and then I noticed the nurse so maybe I'll stay around for a while."

"You're better," he said. "Now, look, Pete. You're not supposed to do much talking, so I'll do it. I think everything is pretty well cleaned up anyway. You're an idiot and a lucky one at that."

"Sticks and stones," I said.

He grinned at me. "You had a narrow squeak. You lost a hell of a lot of blood and the bones in that shoulder are messed up a little. But you'll be all right before long."

"Eddie?"

"He'll live long enough to die for murder. The gun fit all right. Besides, he was in pretty bad shape and he made a full confession last night."

"Johnny and Big Jim?"

"Johnny was dead and Big Jim is in the hospital and will probably die. If he doesn't we'll get him on Eddie's confession. It's a damn good thing for you, too."

"Sure," I said.

"How come you didn't ask about Lieutenant Hennessey?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, him," I said. "It was an accident."

"The hell it was," Weston said. "But Eddie's confession covered him, too, so I don't think there'll be much of a fuss."

"You got the painting?" I asked.

"Sure. And in the back of it we found eight hundred and sixty thousand dollars in cash. A nice round sum. Incidentally, Honey Parker started raising hell yesterday about you stealing the picture of her."

"Give it back to her."

"I already did," he said. "She'll really flip when she finds out all that money was in the back of it. We haven't given that story to the papers yet."

"She may try to use that to claim it," I said. "As a matter of fact, Gino didn't give her the picture and I think it can be proved that he meant to keep it himself."

"How did you know it was there?" he asked.

"It was crazy," I said. "I was talking to you and I told you how his wife said he always put his money on naked women and horses and it suddenly struck me that the picture might be the logical place for him to hide it. So I managed to get a peek and there it was."

"Time, Lieutenant," the nurse said, sticking her head in.

"Okay," the lieutenant said. "I'll see you tomorrow, Pete. Take it easy."

"What the hell else can I do?" I demanded, but he only grinned at me and left.

The nurse came back in. "Did he upset you?" she asked.

"No," I said shortly.

"There is another visitor to see you, then," she said. "But only for two minutes."

"Okay," I said. I didn't care especially either way.

The nurse went out and then she came in. Joyce. As usual, she looked beautiful.

"Oh, you poor darling," she said as she came to the bed. "I've been so worried about you." She bent over and kissed me on the cheek. When she spoke her voice was lower. "Did you find the money?"

"I found it," I said.

"How much was there?"

"Eight hundred and sixty thousand."

"How wonderful," she said. "Darling, is there any need to say anything to the police about that? You've done enough for them. Why not just turn it over to me? After all, I was the one who hired you to find it. And then when you're better, we could go away together. Think what a wonderful time we could have on that much money."

I looked at her and suddenly I was very tired. "No," I said. "I told you my price was a hundred a day and expenses—not eight hundred and sixty thousand. Besides I've already told the police and they have the money."

For a minute her face tightened. "Well," she said finally, "that's not too bad. They can't dispute the three hundred and sixty thousand and I'm sure a court will award me the rest. We can still go away together when you're well."

"No," I said again. "That money is too rich for my blood. And there's something else."

"What?"

"For the past few days all I seem to have been doing is stepping in Gino Masagna's shoes—consorting with his partners and sleeping with his women. It makes even me feel a little dirty. Gino appreciated a lot of money and beautiful women and everything he touched got dirtied. Some of it's in you. And some day I'd wake up and find it was in me. No, honey, I've had all that I ever want to do with Gino's money or his women. I've had both for a few minutes."

"You're out of your head," she exclaimed.

"No, very much in it," I said. "Gino was a chaser. He chased money and women and he didn't care how he got them. I've had it. I'm through except for one thing. When I get out of here I'm going to go up to Rolin City and plant a sprig of poison ivy on his grave. That's what I should have taken to his bier that first day." I laughed. "That would have put the foam on the bier of a chaser."

"Shut up," she cried hysterically.

"I had some expenses on the case for you," I said, "but I didn't work ten days, so we'll call everything square. You don't owe me anything and I don't owe you anything. Now, get out."

She left and after a time I went to sleep.

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